

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Tuesday, May 2

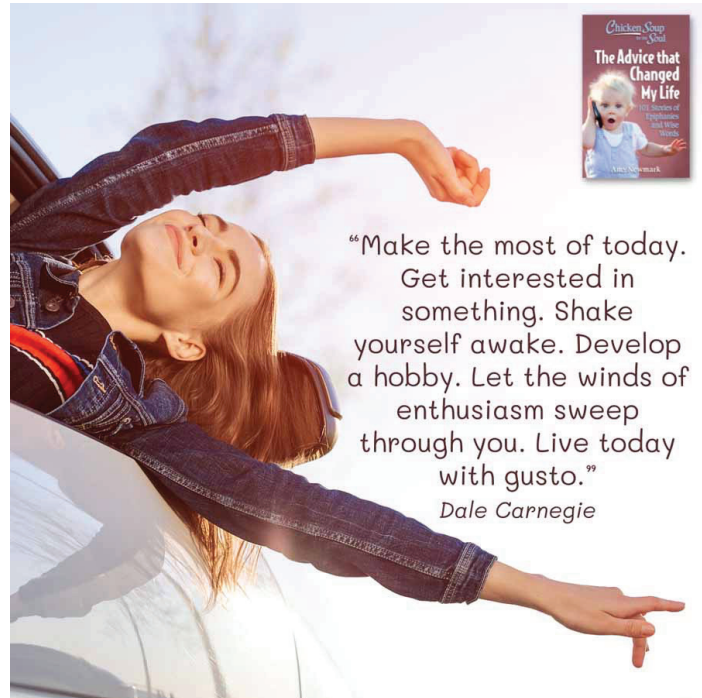
- School Breakfast: French toast.
- School Lunch: Corndogs, tater tots.
- Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes and ham, beets, sunset salad, cookie, whole wheat bread.
- Track at Milbank, 1 p.m.
- Elementary Spring Concert, 7 p.m.
- City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.
- The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
- United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Wednesday, May 3

- School Breakfast: Egg Omelets.
- School Lunch: Turkey gravy over mashed potatoes.
- Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, lettuce salad with dressing, Mandarin orange salad, whole wheat bread.
- High School Baseball hosts Sioux Valley, V/JV, 6 p.m.
- Groton Chamber Board Meeting at City Hall, Noon.
- Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm
- United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30

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

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.



“Make the most of today. Get interested in something. Shake yourself awake. Develop a hobby. Let the winds of enthusiasm sweep through you. Live today with gusto.”
Dale Carnegie

a.m.; PPR Meeting in Conde, 7 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 4

- School Breakfast: Muffins.
- School Lunch: Goulash, corn, bun.
- Senior Menu: Oven fried chicken, sweet potatoes, mixed vegetables, cookie, dinner roll.
- Girls Golf at Lee Park, Aberdeen, 10 a.m.
- High School Spring Concert, 7 p.m.
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

Friday, May 5

- School Breakfast: Eggs and sausage.
- School Lunch: Fish nuggets, try taters.
- Senior Menu: Taco salad, Mexican rice, breadstick, lemon tart bar.
- Track at Sisseton, 3 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

homa property, including the remains of the teenage girls.

- The fashion world gathered in New York for the 2023 Met Gala, honoring the work of designer Karl Lagerfeld. Tennis legend Serena Williams confirmed she is pregnant with her second child at the event.
- Canadian folk singer Gordon Lightfoot has died in hospital in Toronto. He was 84 years old.
- At least six people were killed after a windstorm in central Illinois kicked up blinding dust that caused several vehicle crashes along a major highway.
- Oklahoma Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt signed a bill into law that bans gender-affirming medical care for minors, joining at least 15 other states that ban such healthcare.
- More than 100 police officers were wounded in clashes across France, while nearly 300 people were arrested as protestors joined Labor Day rallies against President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms.
- China touted its efforts to evacuate its citizens, and those from other nations, from Sudan as the U.S.' own efforts to rescue Americans continue to face criticism.
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, the Russian military has lost over 100,000 soldiers to death or injury in Bakhmut over the last four months, according to new U.S. estimates.

What to Watch in the Day Ahead

- Pfizer will likely post a 35% decline in first-quarter revenue, Trefis predicts, but revenues and earnings are expected to beat consensus estimates. The drugmaker's COVID-19 vaccine and antiviral pills are expected to see a significant drop, however, sales of other products will trend higher. AMD, Ford, and Starbucks are among other major companies set to report quarterly results.
- Jobs opening and factory orders figures for March are on the economic calendar, due at 10 a.m. ET.
- The 76th Tony Award nominations will be announced by Lea Michele and Myles Frost. The announcement, honoring shows, performances, and artistry of the 2022-2023 Broadway season, will be streamed on Tony Awards' YouTube channel and on CBS Mornings from 8:30 a.m. ET.
- Princess Charlotte — the second child of Prince William and Kate Middleton and third in line to the throne — celebrates her eighth birthday just days before taking on a significant role in her grandfather King Charles' coronation.

- A Texas man, identified as Francisco Oropesa Perez-Torres, wanted for the killing of five family members was deported at least four times for entering the U.S. illegally, according to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

- Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned lawmakers that the U.S. could default on its debt "as early as June 1" if Congress does not "increase or suspend the debt limit" soon.

- A search for two missing teenagers came to an end after law enforcement found seven bodies on a rural Okla-

GDILIVE.COM

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

May 2, 2023 – 7:00pm

City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

- Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1

(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)

- Minutes
- Adjourn the 135th City Council
 - Convene the 136th City Council – Oath of Office
 - Appoint Vacant Council Seat – Ward 1
 - Election of Officers: President and Vice President
 - Appoint Advisory Committees
- Appoint Attorney
- Motion to approve bills each meeting & authorize the Finance Officer to pay payroll and all regular monthly bills in a timely manner to avoid penalties and take advantage of discounts
 - Park Bathrooms – FEMA Grant – Ted Dickey from NECOG & Ken Hier from IMEG
 - Baseball Concessions Project
 - Airport Discussion – Darrell Hillestad
 - Department Reports
 - City Park Soundsystem
 - Jailhouse Discussion
 - Renewable Energy Certificate Designated Entity Contract
 - Surplus Old Digger Truck
 - 2022 Annual Report
 - Emergency Snow Removal Signs on Main Street
 - Purchase of Sign for Groton PD Building
 - Join PFAS Cost Recovery Program
 - Bills
 - Economic Development
 - Sign Audit Engagement Letter with Eide Bailly for 2020/2021
 - Sign Audit Engagement Letter with Eide Bailly for 2022
 - Reschedule May 16, 2023 Council Meeting to May 17, 2023
 - Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
 - Adjournment

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Travels with Tony

It's about the people. That's what makes our communities special, right? Otherwise, we're six months of winter and "a large, rectangular blank spot in the nation's mind," as North Dakota native son Eric Sevareid, put it. We know what we have—and no, it's not the Black Hills, rest of the world—and if that's a secret, fine by me.

We don't have everything, but we have the opportunity to get it. I'm not talking about things. I'm talking about experiences. Art. Culture. People.

My trip to Chicago last month will go down as a business trip for my CPA, but I always try to build in some extra time to experience a city that for many of us is just a place where we sprint to make a connection.

This trip was for Axpona, an annual Audio Show for the finest and newest gear in the world—Comic-Con for audiophile geeks. Our small enterprise, Darwin Cables, is just a blip among \$150,000 speakers and quarter-million dollar systems. It was our job to connect advanced tube amplification from Pennsylvania's Rogue Audio to Minnesota-made and world-revered Magnepan speakers.

Don't worry, I'm not going to drag you down that rabbit hole. For me, these trips are about experiences, about exploring places we usually only see on the news. About the people you meet.

I took seven or eight Uber rides during my stay. I learned from a traveling companion years ago the joy of striking up a conversation with your driver.

There was the ancient chain-smoking lady taxi driver in New Orleans who became a tour guide and took us to the Metairie Cemetery and other places beyond Bourbon Street, places like Frenchmen Street where the locals congregate for the real jazz.

The petite ballet teacher who drove India and me from Pittsburgh to Morgantown, West Virginia. In New York, a few years after 9/11, a cabbie told us how much people despised Rudy Giuliani, but that he'd cleaned up the crime-ridden streets. Civil rights be damned. But I'm not there to judge. Rather to listen. Absorb. Learn. If you're not talking to the people, you're missing the most important part of the experience.

Just two of my Chicago drivers were Americans by birth—a computer programmer who knew every language in computerease and a retired Marine who explained to me the coming roadway improvements that would soon make it easier to get to O' Hare. Among the others was a lovely Columbian mother of two who shared her family's quest to better themselves. "There is so much opportunity here, so much more than in Bogota," she said.

A driver who hailed from a place an hour north of Mumbai gave me travel trips should I ever get to India. It's on my list. A Kenyan who claimed to be my age but looked 20 years younger, in resplendent attire with dazzling gold jewelry, told me about the family he'd raised, a son who'd become a physician.

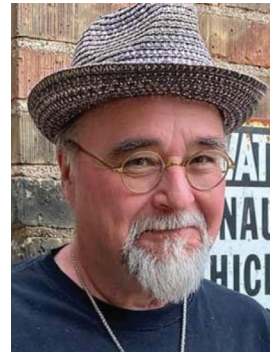
A Mexican immigrant, a mechanic by trade, was driving to help put his kids through college. Another Latino, a contractor, provided insight into Chicago politics and his frustration with the constant unsolved thefts at his construction sites. He theorized that the police just didn't seem to want to serve the last mayor but he held out hope for cooperation with the new administration.

My favorite driver was the Jordanian with three budding teenage daughters by his Lebanese wife. "I'll bet you have no room on the bathroom counter," I kidded. I was right, he allowed, and then he showed me pictures of the kids. Dark eyes, dark hair, beyond gorgeous. "Your wife must be beautiful; It can't be from you," I teased, employing the time-tested passive-aggressive German-Russian humor. He laughed and showed me a picture. Indeed, she was stunning.

He was blessed. And knew it.

I couldn't help but ponder their perspectives. Their appreciation. They're here for the opportunity, working hard, and in the process they make our lives better. Meanwhile, oblivious, we complain about the way things are. World-class ingrates, we are.

They pine to get in at our borders to fill hundreds of thousands of workplace vacancies—some 30-40,000 in North Dakota alone, and yet, some would keep them out. Threatened by "different." Unless you're Na-



**That's
Life**
by Tony Bender

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tive American, we're the products of immigration, a mixing pot that's built a truly great country, flaws, sins, and all.

I always return home wiser with a broader perspective and renewed hope and faith in America's resilience, elasticity, and yes, her greatness. The news gives us mostly the bad and the ugly. That's the nature of the news. No crash, no news. But mostly things are good. People—even most of the the knot-heads—are good. We just need reminders.

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GDILIVE.COM

Elementary Spring Concert

Tuesday, May 2, 2023, 7 p.m.

GHS Gym



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Local panel tells Rep. Johnson to protect business ties with China

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 1, 2023 5:27 PM

SIOUX FALLS — At a roundtable that Rep. Dusty Johnson organized Monday to discuss “the impact of the Chinese Communist Party,” some South Dakota business and agricultural leaders told him to protect business ties with Chinese partners.

Johnson, R-South Dakota, is a member of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party. He organized the roundtable to learn about the impact that the Chinese government has on the state. The roundtable at the Greater Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce included business leaders, agricultural leaders and academics.

Some participants told Johnson they value their relationships with Chinese partners and expressed concern about actions that could hurt their businesses and institutions.

“China is a huge buyer of dairy products,” said Jason Mischel, of Valley Queen Cheese Factory in Milbank. “Without access to that market, it would have a big impact on American dairy producers.”

The roundtable was the latest in a string of events, media appearances, speeches and social media postings by Johnson focusing on threats from China’s communist government.

“We have hoped for 30 years that economic engagement would make China freer,” Johnson said Monday. “What we are doing is not working.”

Some roundtable participants were more focused on the potential economic ramifications of alienating China.

“Our supply chain is enormous coming out of China,” said Judd Guthmiller, international vice president at Daktronics, a Brookings-based scoreboard maker that relies on Chinese manufacturing.

Johnson sees China growing more authoritarian as it shifts even further toward one-man rule and leverages advanced technologies to control and sometimes abuse its people, steal intellectual property and spy on other nations. Johnson has said the U.S. should “strategically decouple” from China by moving vital supply chains for items such as pharmaceuticals and computer chips out of the country, while still sending agricultural commodities to China and engaging in other trade.

Evert Van der Sluis, professor of economics at South Dakota State University, said political leaders should focus on strengthening relationships with allies and investing in research and education efforts that ensure American supremacy, rather than economic decoupling.

“As we move towards a system of fragmentation with a China-based world and U.S.-based world, we have to look at costs,” Van der Sluis said. “If we want to remove ourselves from China, we have to acknowledge that prices will go up, and increase inflation even more.”

Agriculture’s biggest customer

U.S. agricultural exports to China in fiscal year 2022 reached \$36.4 billion, surpassing the previous year’s record and making China the U.S.’s largest agricultural export market for the second consecutive year.

Those record numbers came after Chinese retaliatory tariffs in 2019, during the administration of President Donald Trump, resulted in the lowest export values in a decade.

“For the average South Dakota farmer, \$50,000 was the average loss,” said Jerry Schmitz, executive director of the South Dakota Soybean Association, referring to 2019.

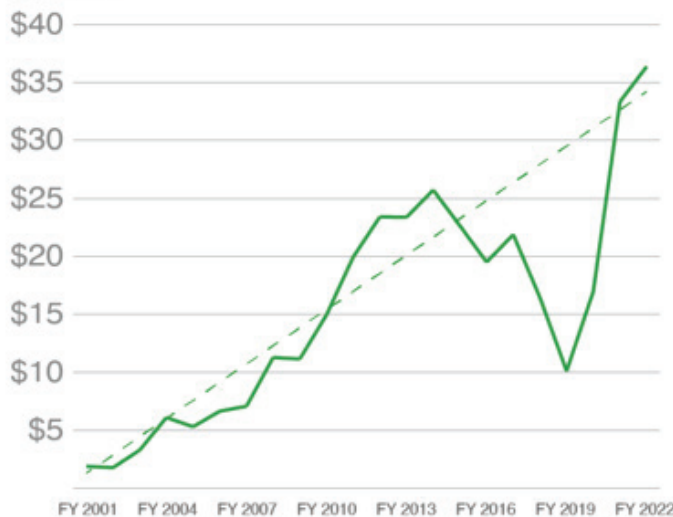
China is the world’s largest soybean importer, accounting for half of U.S. soybean export value.

China is also the world’s largest consumer of feed grains, like corn, sorghum and alfalfa hay. Additionally, China’s beef consumption and import demand have grown over the past decade, with total imports

Record U.S. FY 2022 Agricultural Exports to China

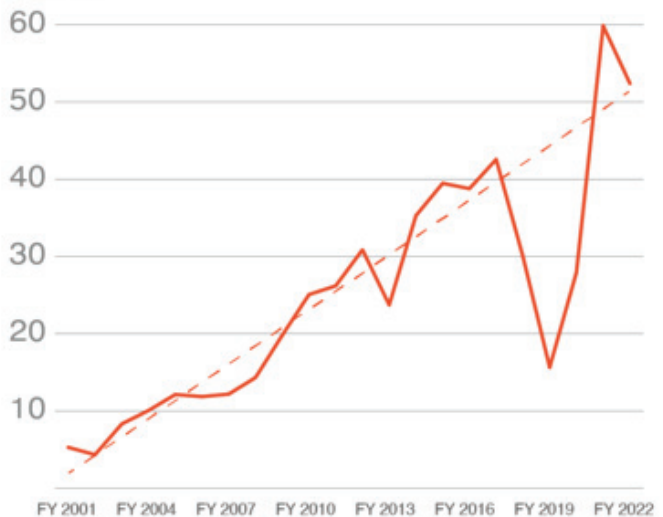
U.S. Export Value to China

Billion USD



U.S. Export Volume* to China

Million MT



Source: Trade Data Monitor LLC.

Note: Fiscal year (FY) is on an October – September basis. For example, FY 2022 is October 2021 – September 2022. Volume* is for all bulk grains, oilseeds, and cotton. These products typically account for greater than two-thirds of U.S. export value to China.

📷 (Chart courtesy of USDA)

reaching \$17 billion in 2022.

“They are the consumer,” Schmitz said. “And if we say we’re not going to sell to China anymore, or only a third as much, then another country is going to come in, buy our soybeans, transfer them to China, and we lose.”

Sino-American decoupling

President Joe Biden is already imposing new actions to counter China; specifically, banning the export of advanced technologies that might help China’s military build world-dominating weapons or artificial intelligence systems. And Biden signed the CHIPS Act, which aims to move some vital semiconductor manufacturing from China back to the United States.

The export ban is having an impact – a woman was recently caught smuggling computer chips to China in a fake baby bump. The policies have reverberated throughout supply chains, leaving some Chinese firms struggling to finalize business plans, fulfill orders and build production lines.

And then there’s TikTok, a Chinese-owned social media app that claims 150 million American users. Many Democratic and Republican politicians believe that user data is at risk. There are multiple ideas about how to ban TikTok at the national level, and several states have already taken action. South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem has banned TikTok on state government devices.

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.

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COMMENTARY

Maybe we love the Second Amendment a little too much

DANA HESS

When she spoke at the National Rifle Association Leadership Forum, Gov. Kristi Noem said that South Dakota is setting the standard as the most Second Amendment friendly state in nation. If it's true — and why would anyone lie to the NRA? — it's worth noting how we got that designation.

In the five legislative sessions during Noem's time as governor, there were 53 firearms or concealed carry bills before the Legislature. Of course Noem wasn't responsible for the appearance of all these bills. However, someone in leadership must set a tone that's welcoming of legislation dealing with firearms.

With an average of more than 10 firearms bills per year, South Dakota lawmakers certainly seem like they are smitten with the Second Amendment. And, like lovers everywhere, sometimes they're so besotted that they do something silly. Fortunately for us, while their work has led the governor to declare South Dakota's leadership in Second Amendment friendliness, often legislators work fast when it comes to disposing of those firearms bills that are bound to misfire.

In the just completed legislative session, the House Judiciary Committee made quick work of House Bill 1173, which would have prevented enforcement of federal laws related to firearms. This was likely submitted to circumvent an attempt by the government to take away guns, a recurring theme during Noem's speech to the NRA though this federal confiscation of weapons never seems to take place.

In 2020, anyone who has ever made a stink about the size of their real estate tax bill was glad to hear that the Senate Judiciary Committee killed Senate Bill 51, which would have authorized the possession of a concealed pistol by employees in a county courthouse. That was a busy year for firearms oddities as the Senate State Affairs Committee killed Senate Concurrent Resolution 602, which invited responsible gun owners from Virginia to relocate in South Dakota.

In 2022, the Legislature quickly disposed of SB 182, which would have prohibited discriminatory actions against the firearms industry. The bill was aimed at financial institutions, seeking to ensure that banks would do business with the firearms industry. The bill didn't make it out of the Senate Commerce and Energy Committee, but that didn't stop Noem from presenting an eerily similar executive order at the NRA forum.

Her executive order bars state agencies from doing business with banks with more than \$100 billion in assets that discriminate against firearm-related entities. She signed the executive order at the NRA forum, despite the fact that legislative leaders say they couldn't find a South Dakota bank to which it would apply.

Sometimes the Legislature gives the bum's rush to bills that sound like they make sense. In 2023, the House Judiciary Committee killed HB 1213, which would have made it a Class 6 felony for allowing a minor to have a gun that's then used in the commission of a felony.

Obviously, not all 53 firearms bills considered by the Legislature made it into law. At the NRA forum, Noem did brag about a bill that did get signed. She said the first piece of legislation she ever signed as governor was the one that allows concealed carry of a firearm without a permit. Known as constitutional carry, this law allows that if you're enough of an upright citizen to meet all the requirements to purchase a gun, you have the right to carry it concealed in public. She also noted that South Dakota will pick up your tab during a gun purchase for the cost of the federal background check.

It's hard to follow the logic that says the state will charge \$28 to renew a driver's license or \$55 for a combination hunting and fishing license, but it's so happy when you carry a gun that the state will throw in the cost of a federal background check for free.

At one point in her speech, Noem said that the NRA isn't made up of just "old white guys." On a copy of her speech circulated to the media, Noem said it in all caps: "I AM THE NRA!"

Well, maybe she is. But some of us would prefer that she concentrate on being the governor of South Dakota. And, while she's at it, maybe she could send a message to the Legislature that as the most Second Amendment friendly state in the nation, they don't need to continue to try to prove their love of guns with any more silly legislation. As a state, we've gone about as far as we can go in proving our love of guns.

It's time to love something else.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

U.S. could default as early as June 1, Yellen warns Congress

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MAY 1, 2023 5:08 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned Monday that the U.S. could default in as soon as one month if Congress does not act to raise the nation's borrowing limit — a prediction that prompted President Joe Biden to call a meeting with congressional leaders next week.

In a letter to lawmakers, Yellen wrote that after reviewing recent tax receipts, "our best estimate is that we will be unable to continue to satisfy all of the government's obligations by early June, and potentially as early as June 1, if Congress does not raise or suspend the debt limit before that time."

The GOP-led U.S. House passed a debt ceiling bill April 26 by a slim margin, 217-215, to temporarily raise the limit by \$1.5 trillion or until March 31, 2024, whichever comes first, and tied the measure to massive discretionary spending cuts and changes in federal programs.

Biden and Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York say the spending cuts are a nonstarter and the debt ceiling must be considered on its own.

The U.S. hit its \$31.4 trillion borrowing limit on Jan. 19, triggering the Treasury Department to invoke "extraordinary measures," or special accounting maneuvers, to continue paying the nation's bills.

The Treasury will now begin suspending the issuance of State and Local Government Series securities — special securities offered to state and local governments that count against the debt ceiling. The maneuver was also used in the 2014 and 2015 debt ceiling debates as a way to delay the U.S. from reaching its borrowing limit.

"We have learned from past debt limit impasses that waiting until the last minute to suspend or increase the debt limit can cause serious harm to business and consumer confidence, raise short-term borrowing costs for taxpayers, and negatively impact the credit rating of the United States. If Congress fails to increase the debt limit, it would cause severe hardship to American families, harm our global leadership position, and raise questions about our ability to defend our national security interests," Yellen wrote.

"I respectfully urge Congress to protect the full faith and credit of the United States by acting as soon as possible," she wrote in closing.

According to the administration, Biden called House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who is leading lawmakers on a trip in Israel, and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell to invite them to a May 9 meeting at the White House with Schumer and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries.

The Congressional Budget Office, a nonpartisan body that analyzes the cost of legislation, also warned Monday that because the Internal Revenue Service is not hampered by pandemic restrictions, the agency is processing receipts at a faster rate than recent years.

"As a result, we anticipate that the IRS will process relatively few additional payments in May, as it did in the years before the pandemic. That, in combination with less-than-expected receipts through April, means that the Treasury's extraordinary measures will be exhausted sooner than we previously projected," CBO Director Phillip Swagel wrote Monday.

The CBO projected that the GOP's Limit, Save, Grow Act would reduce the federal deficit by a projected \$4.8 trillion over the next decade.

The Senate Committee on the Budget will hold a hearing Thursday on the House GOP legislation.

Following Yellen's warning, Schumer and Jeffries issued a joint statement again criticizing the GOP bill.

"We do not have the luxury of waiting until June 1 to come together, pass a clean bill to avoid a default and prevent catastrophic consequences for our economy and millions of American families. Republicans cannot allow right-wing extremism to hold our nation hostage," the statement read.

"For generations, Congress has made spending and revenue decisions as part of the annual budget process, which is currently underway. That is the appropriate place to debate and discuss our nation's

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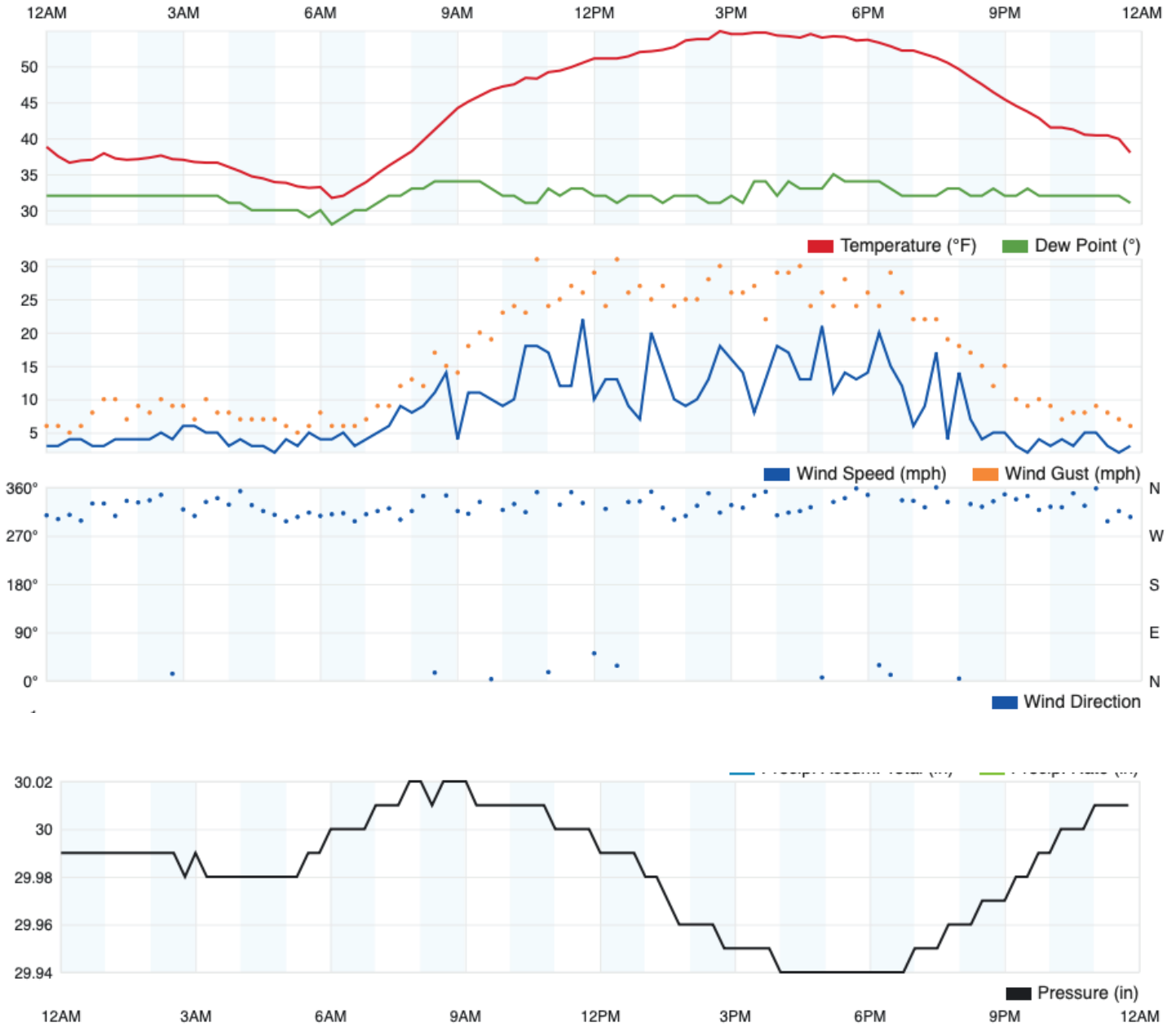
fiscal picture — not in a hostage-situation in which extreme MAGA Republicans try to impose their radical agenda on America. It's time to put aside partisan interests and do what is right and necessary for the American people to avoid a first-ever U.S. government default that crashes the stock market, raises costs on families, and jeopardizes retirement savings," it continued.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



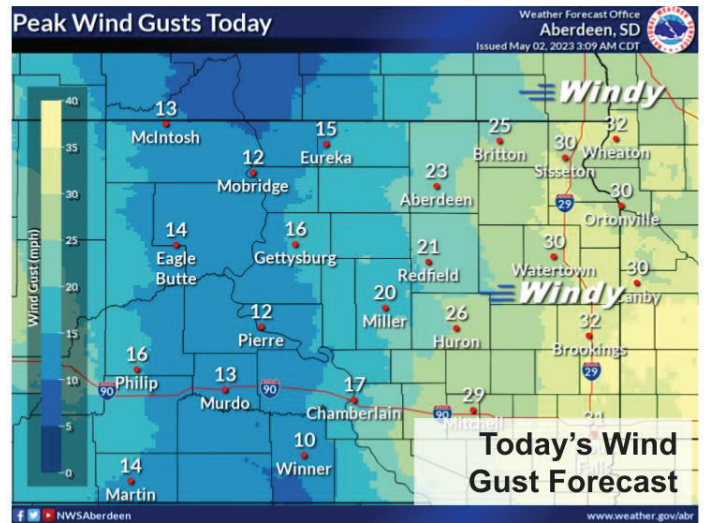
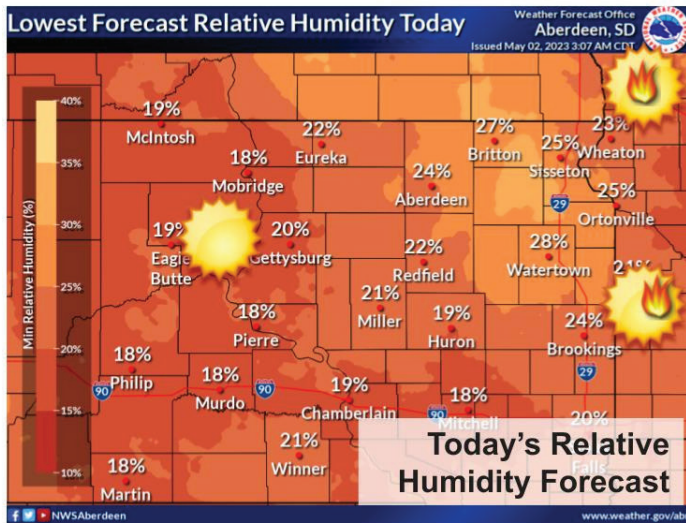
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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
						
Sunny	Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny then Slight Chance Showers
High: 62 °F	Low: 35 °F	High: 71 °F	Low: 41 °F	High: 71 °F	Low: 44 °F	High: 67 °F

Red Flag Warning In Effect Over Western Minnesota From Noon to 8 PM Today

- Forecast relative humidity of 25% or less this afternoon in Minnesota
- Forecast windy conditions including gusts of 25 to 35 mph
- Potential for any fire starts to spread rapidly, so avoid burning on Today!



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: May 2, 2023 4:05 AM

Dry and windy conditions will support the potential for rapid fire growth today, should a fire start. The worse fire weather conditions will occur over western Minnesota.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 55 °F at 3:20 PM

Low Temp: 32 °F at 6:16 AM

Wind: 31 mph at 10:42 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 24 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1955

Record Low: 20 in 1909

Average High: 65

Average Low: 38

Average Precip in May.: 0.22

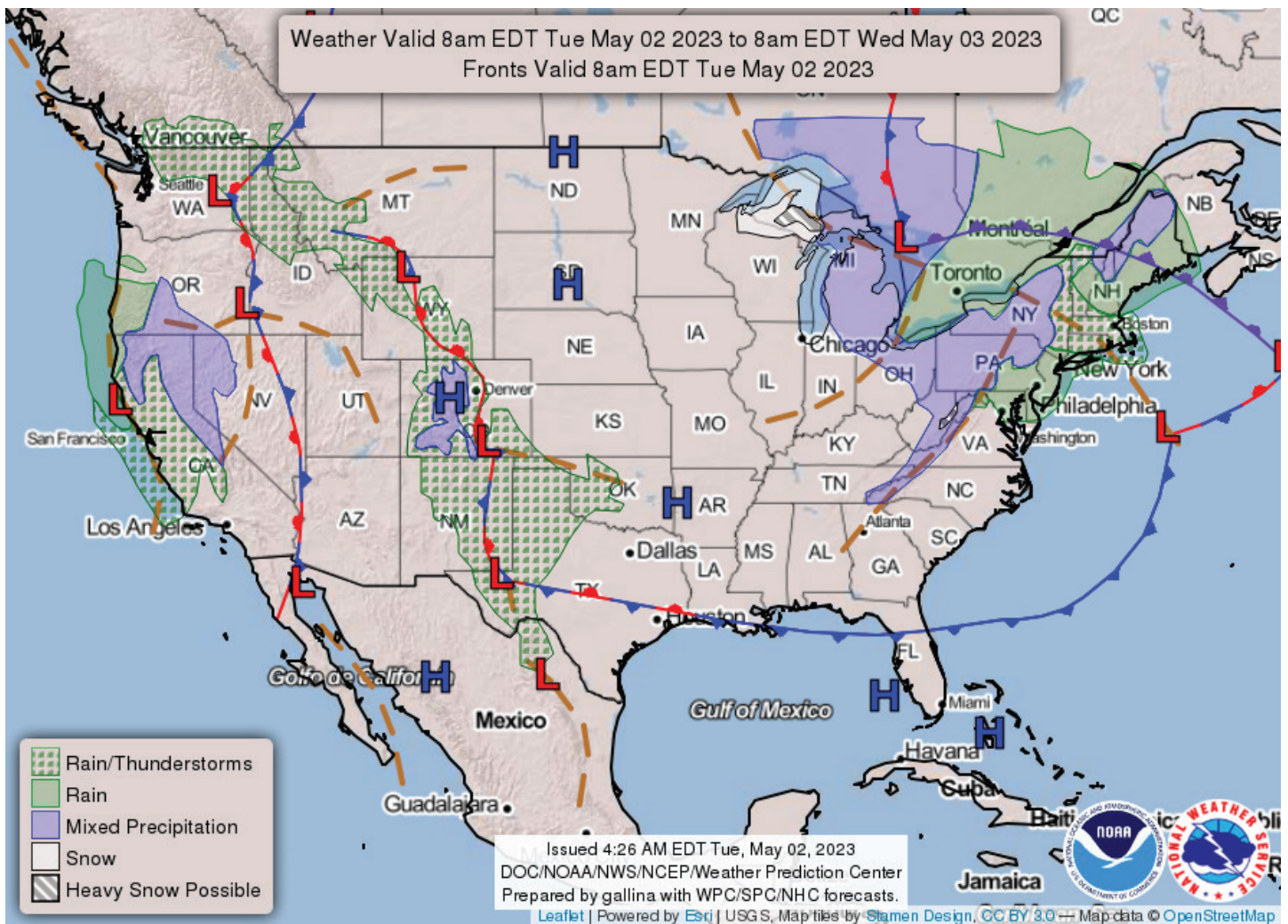
Precip to date in May.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 4.19

Precip Year to Date: 5.72

Sunset Tonight: 8:41:28 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:15:48 AM



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Today in Weather History

May 2, 1984: High winds picked up a trailer home northwest of the Pierre Airport and hurled it through the air, smashing it to the ground 50 yards away. The upper sections of a home were damaged by the airborne trailer. Several branches and shed roofs were also damaged nearby.

May 2, 2008: A two-day blizzard dropped two to four feet of snow across the northern Black Hills and in Harding and Butte counties. Six to 14 inches of snow fell along the eastern foothills and in western Perkins and Meade counties.

1762: A tornado struck Port Royal Island, South Carolina. It left a path 400 yards wide, tore up trees by the roots, and carried away houses and bridges.

1899 - A storm buried Havre, MT, under 24.8 inches of snow, an all-time record for that location. The water equivalent of 2.48 inches was a record 24 hour total for the month of May. (The Weather Channel)

1920 - A swarm of tornadoes in Rogers, Mayes and Cherokee Counties in Oklahoma killed 64 persons. (David Ludlum)

1929: Virginia's worst tornado disaster occurred on this day. Six tornadoes, two of which were west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, killed 22 people. One tornado killed twelve children and a teacher at Rye Cove, in Scott County. The storms destroyed four schools.

1983: Severe thunderstorms produced 21 tornadoes across the northeastern states of Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York. One tornado even occurred in Ontario, Canada. Of the 21 tornadoes in the United States, nine were rated F3, and six were rated F2. The tornadoes caused five deaths.

1987 - Thunderstorms in the Lower Mississippi Valley produced golf ball size hail in northern Louisiana, and wind gusts to 77 mph at Lake Providence LA. Thunderstorms in Arkansas produced 4.20 inches of rain at Arkadelphia and 4.00 inches at Bismarck. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A powerful storm produced snow and high winds in the Central Rockies and the Central High Plains Region. Snowfall totals in Colorado ranged up to 12 inches at Strasburg, and winds in southeastern Colorado gusted to 87 mph at Lamar. Snow and high winds created blizzard conditions in eastern Colorado and southeastern Wyoming. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing to the north of a warm front produced severe weather in Oklahoma and Texas. There were 93 reports of severe weather. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 80 mph at Beattie, and baseball size hail was reported at Ranger and Breckenridge. Juneau AK reported a record high temperature of 72 degrees while Honolulu equalled their record low for the month of May with a reading of 60 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2010: May began with two days of historical rainfall over much of Middle Tennessee, with massive swath stretching along the I-40 corridor from Benton County to Davidson County. Some areas received nearly 20 inches of rain during this 2-day period, the highest of which was 19.41 inches reported by a CoCoRaHS observer in Camden, TN. Numerous rainfall records were broken at the Nashville International Airport, including the most rain received in a 6 hour period, highest calendar day rainfall, and wettest month, along with several others. Incredibly, the Nashville Airport experienced its wettest and third wettest days in history on back to back days. Many area rivers exceeded their record crest levels, including the Harpeth River near Kingston Springs, which rose to 13.8 feet above the previous record. The Cumberland River at Nashville reached its highest level since flood control was implemented in the late 1960s, flooding parts of downtown Nashville. Waters from the Cumberland reached as far inland as 2nd Avenue, flooding many downtown businesses. Forty-nine Tennessee counties were declared disaster areas with damage estimates of between \$2 and \$3 billion statewide. Many Nashville landmarks received damage from floodwaters, including Gaylord Opryland Hotel and the Grand Ole Opry. Other popular Nashville landmarks affected by the floods include LP Field, Bridgestone Arena, the Country Music Hall of Fame, and the Schermerhorn Symphony Center, which received damage to the basement and its contents, including two Steinway grand pianos and the console of the Martin Foundation Concert Organ. Over \$300 million in Federal Disaster Assistance was approved for the people of Tennessee.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

IT'S WHAT'S INSIDE THAT COUNTS

Paganini, one of the world's most famous violinists, walked onto the stage before a large crowd. Just before he began playing, he looked at the violin he was holding and realized that it was not his. He was horrified, but it was too late for him to do anything about the violin. It was time to begin!

After the concert, the critics and audience said it was the best concert of his entire career.

When questioned about using a violin that belonged to another person, he said, "Today I learned the most important lesson of my life. I once believed that the music was in the violin. Today I learned that it was in me."

God has given each of us different abilities and gifts. They vary in name and number but not in value. They may be obvious to others or they may be seen only by Him. Our gifts come from God. What we do with them is our gift back to Him. We must realize that His gifts are within us and only come to life when we respond to the opportunities He gives us to develop them and serve Him - whatever they are and wherever we may be.

Prayer: Empower us, Lord to develop the gifts and abilities You have given us to serve others and bring honor and glory to You. May we be who we can be. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. Romans 12:6



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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2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/08/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 06/17/2023 Groton Triathlon
- 07/04/2023 Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Golf Tournament
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.28.23

18 38 53 62 64 20

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$52,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 49 Mins 32
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.01.23

2 17 20 31 45 3

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,650,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 49
DRAW: Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.01.23

7 10 14 16 26 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 19 Mins 32
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.29.23

4 9 11 13 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$43,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 49
DRAW: Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.01.23

14 20 29 33 57 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 48
DRAW: Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.01.23

3 38 55 61 66 1

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$71,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 48
DRAW: Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

US culture wars dominated North Dakota's legislative session

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press/Report for America

North Dakota's House and Senate have adjourned, capping a session in which state lawmakers aggressively passed bills to restrict transgender rights, abortion access and library content — offering a glimpse of how Republican-controlled states have responded to these national hot-button issues.

Republican Gov. Doug Burgum has until May 19 to act on pending bills passed by the Legislature before lawmakers adjourned early Sunday. Here is where they landed.

TRANS RIGHTS

House and Senate lawmakers passed several bills with veto-proof majorities that were signed into law by the governor and place sweeping restrictions on transgender people in North Dakota.

The new laws prohibit transgender girls and women from joining female sports teams in K-12 and college. They also criminalize health care providers who give gender-affirming care to minors. And they limit transgender children and adults in accessing the bathrooms, locker rooms and shower rooms of their choice in state-run colleges and correctional facilities.

Burgum has not yet acted on a bill — which also passed both chambers with veto-proof majorities — that would allow teachers and government employees to ignore the pronouns their transgender colleagues and students use.

The bill also would require teachers to tell a student's parent or legal guardian if the student identifies as transgender. And, it would prohibit transgender students from using the bathroom of their choice, unless they have approval from a parent or guardian.

It's all part of a larger push by Republicans across the U.S. to roll back LGBTQ+ rights.

At least 21 states have restricted or banned female transgender athletes' participation in female sports, and at least 14 states have restricted or banned gender-affirming care for minors. Additionally, at least eight states have enacted laws preventing transgender people from using the restrooms associated with their gender identities.

ABORTION ACCESS

Burgum signed a bill into law that expands public assistance for pregnant women, days after he signed a law that bans abortion at all stages of pregnancy with narrow exceptions. Both measures passed the Legislature with veto-proof majorities.

Abortion is still legal in pregnancies caused by rape or incest, but only in the first six weeks of gestation. After that, there is no exception for rape or incest. Abortion is also allowed later in a pregnancy in specific medical emergencies.

The new abortion ban was intended to replace a previous one, which had even fewer exceptions. The North Dakota Supreme Court ruled in March that the previous ban will remain blocked while a separate lawsuit over its constitutionality proceeds.

Last year's U.S. Supreme Court ruling that overturned the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision — and dissolved a nationwide right to abortion — has triggered multiple state laws banning or restricting the procedure. Many have been met with legal challenges.

At least 13 other states have bans in place for abortion at all stages of pregnancy, while a handful of others have prohibitions throughout pregnancy where enforcement has been blocked by courts.

LIBRARY CONTENT

Burgum vetoed a bill that would have required librarians — under threat of criminal penalty — to screen sexually explicit materials from children, but signed another bill barring explicit materials from the children's sections of local and school libraries.

Senate lawmakers voted to override Burgum's veto, but House lawmakers voted to let his veto stand. Supporters of the bill had said exposure to sexually explicit material is devastating for young people,

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whereas opponents had said the bill to criminalize librarians goes too far.

Attempted book bans and restrictions on libraries have surged around the country, setting a record in 2022, according to the American Library Association. Some books have been targeted by liberals citing racist language, while other books with LGBTQ+ or racial themes have been targeted by conservatives.

Bills to restrict books have been proposed or passed in Arizona, Iowa, Texas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Florida and other states.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Legislation that failed to pass is equally important. It includes a resolution that would have enabled the Fort Berthold Reservation to track air and water pollution from oil and gas development on its land, which covers one of the state's largest oil patches. And, it includes a resolution that would have helped the reservation address oil-related spills on state highways within its borders.

Additional bills that were struck down would have granted landowners more rights in the eminent domain process as a company — Summit Carbon Solutions — builds a massive carbon capture pipeline under their homes across the state.

On the other hand, climate-related bills that passed into law include one giving tax incentives to oil companies for fracking, or "restimulating" old oil wells in the state through hydraulic fracturing. It includes another bill to dramatically expand child care assistance — with the intention of attracting more oil workers to the state, along with workers in other industries as North Dakota deals with its ongoing workforce shortage.

Trisha Ahmed is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues. Follow Trisha Ahmed on Twitter: @TrishaAhmed15

Loneliness poses risks as deadly as smoking: surgeon general

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Widespread loneliness in the U.S. poses health risks as deadly as smoking a dozen cigarettes daily, costing the health industry billions of dollars annually, the U.S. surgeon general said Tuesday in declaring the latest public health epidemic.

About half of U.S. adults say they've experienced loneliness, Dr. Vivek Murthy said in a report from his office.

"We now know that loneliness is a common feeling that many people experience. It's like hunger or thirst. It's a feeling the body sends us when something we need for survival is missing," Murthy told The Associated Press in an interview. "Millions of people in America are struggling in the shadows, and that's not right. That's why I issued this advisory to pull back the curtain on a struggle that too many people are experiencing."

The declaration is intended to raise awareness around loneliness but won't unlock federal funding or programming devoted to combatting the issue.

Research shows that Americans, who have become less engaged with worship houses, community organizations and even their own family members in recent decades, have steadily reported an increase in feelings of loneliness. The number of single households has also doubled over the last 60 years.

But the crisis deeply worsened when COVID-19 spread, prompting schools and workplaces to shut their doors and sending millions of Americans to isolate at home away from relatives or friends.

People culled their friend groups during the coronavirus pandemic and reduced time spent with those friends, the surgeon general's report finds. Americans spent about 20 minutes a day in person with friends in 2020, down from 60 minutes daily nearly two decades earlier.

The loneliness epidemic is hitting young people, ages 15 to 24, especially hard. The age group reported a 70% drop in time spent with friends during the same period.

Loneliness increases the risk of premature death by nearly 30%, with the report revealing that those with poor social relationships also had a greater risk of stroke and heart disease. Isolation also elevates a

person's likelihood for experiencing depression, anxiety and dementia.

The surgeon general is calling on workplaces, schools, technology companies, community organizations, parents and other people to make changes that will boost the country's connectedness. He advises people to join community groups and put down their phones when they're catching up with friends; employers to think carefully about their remote work policies; and health systems to provide training for doctors to recognize the health risks of loneliness.

Technology has rapidly exacerbated the loneliness problem, with one study cited in the report finding that people who used social media for two hours or more daily were more than twice as likely to report feeling socially isolated than those who were on such apps for less than 30 minutes a day.

Murthy said social media is driving the increase in loneliness in particular. His report suggests that technology companies roll out protections for children especially around their social media behavior.

"There's really no substitute for in-person interaction," Murthy said. "As we shifted to use technology more and more for our communication, we lost out on a lot of that in-person interaction. How do we design technology that strengthens our relationships as opposed to weaken them?"

Hong Kong to slash elected seats in setback to democracy

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong's leader on Tuesday stepped up a campaign to shut down further democratic challenges by unveiling plans to eliminate most directly elected seats on local district councils, the last major political representative bodies chosen by the public.

Chief Executive John Lee said the proposed overhaul will reduce the proportion of directly elected seats in the municipal-level organization to about 20% — from some 90% currently. That is even lower than the level when these bodies were first set up in the 1980s, when Hong Kong was ruled by Britain.

He said the rest of the 470 seats will be filled by government appointees, rural committee chairpersons and others elected by local committees that are staffed by many pro-establishment figures.

"I do not agree that pure counting (of) election votes mean democracy," he said. "Different places have their own systems that must take into consideration all the characteristics and all the elements of that place."

The planned electoral changes are widely seen as part of Beijing's increasing control over the former British colony, which was promised autonomy when it returned to China in 1997. Two years ago, Hong Kong already amended its electoral laws for its legislature, drastically reducing the public's ability to vote and increasing the number of pro-Beijing lawmakers making decisions for the city.

In the past, the race for the seats of the city's district representatives usually drew little international attention as the councilors mainly handled municipal matters, such as organizing construction projects and ensuring that public facilities are in order.

But their councils took on importance after the city's pro-democracy camp won a landslide victory in the last poll at the height of the anti-government protests in 2019.

Many pro-democracy district councilors eventually resigned in 2021, after authorities introduced an oath-taking requirement to ask them to pledge allegiance to the city. Their mass resignations followed media reports that councilors may have to repay their wages if they are later disqualified from office, which the government had not confirmed or denied at the time.

Critics regarded the requirement as part of a broader crackdown on the pro-democracy movement after the massive protests and enactment of the sweeping national security law in 2020.

The resignations and other disqualifications had left just about one-third of the elected representatives still working in the councils, Lee said.

He said all incoming members will be vetted by a committee to ensure "patriots" are administering Hong Kong. Officials also planned to introduce a monitoring mechanism to allow investigations of councilors whose performance "failed to meet the public's expectation."

Lo Kin-hei, the chairman of Hong Kong's largest pro-democracy party, said members of the public will feel disappointed with the government's move to cut the number of directly elected seats. He predicted

there will be fewer people who can run when potential candidates face so many restrictions. The next district council election is expected to take place later this year.

Prominent Palestinian hunger striker dies in Israeli custody

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A high-profile Palestinian prisoner died in Israeli custody on Tuesday after a nearly three-month-long hunger strike, Israel's prison service announced, at a time of already soaring tensions between Israel and the Palestinians.

Khader Adnan, a leader in the militant Islamic Jihad group, had begun staging protracted hunger strikes more than a decade ago, introducing a new form of protests against Israel's mass detentions of Palestinians without charges or trials. On Tuesday, the 45-year-old became the first long-term hunger striker to die in Israeli custody.

Palestinians called for a general strike in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and protests were expected later in the day. Palestinian militants fired a volley of rockets from Gaza toward empty fields in Israel. Islamic Jihad said in a statement that "our fight continues and will not stop."

Adnan's death comes as Israel is led by its most right-wing government ever.

Prisons and Palestinian prisoners are overseen by Cabinet minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, an ultra-nationalist politician who previously tightened restrictions on the Palestinian inmates, including shortening their shower time and closing prison bakeries.

Ben-Gvir said Tuesday that prison officials must exhibit "zero-tolerance toward hunger strikes and unrest in security prisons" and ordered prisoners be confined to their cells.

As Israeli-Palestinian violence has spiked, the number of administrative detainees has risen to more than 1,000 over the past year, the highest number in two decades.

For administrative detainees, hunger strikes are often the last recourse. Several have staged hunger strikes lasting several months, often becoming dangerously ill. Previous Israeli governments have at times conceded to some of their demands to avoid deaths in custody.

This time, warnings about Adnan's deteriorating health were ignored, said the advocacy group Physicians for Human Rights Israel.

The group and Adnan's lawyer said they had asked Israeli authorities to move him from his cell to a hospital where his condition could best be monitored. The rights group said a doctor who visited Adnan several days ago warned that his life was in danger.

"We lay the responsibility for his death at the feet of the Israeli authorities," said Dana Moss, from the rights group. "Hunger strikes are one of the few nonviolent tools left to Palestinians as they battle against Israel's unfair legal system, set within a context of long term occupation and a regime of apartheid."

Dawood Shahab, an Islamic Jihad spokesman, called Adnan's death "a full-fledged crime, for which the Israeli occupation bears full and direct responsibility."

In the West Bank, Mohammed Shtayyeh, the prime minister of the Palestinian self-rule government also held Israel responsible. He portrayed Adnan's death as "premeditated assassination by refusing his request for his release, neglecting him medically, and keeping him in his cell despite the seriousness of his health condition."

Israel's prison service said Adnan had been charged with "involvement in terrorist activities." It said he was in a prison medical facility, but had refused medical treatment "until the last moment" while legal proceedings moved forward. It said he was found unconscious in his cell early Tuesday and transferred to a hospital where he was pronounced dead.

Around 200 people gathered outside Adnan's home in the occupied West Bank town of Arraba, holding signs bearing his image and called for revenge. Adnan's widow, Randa Musa, told those gathered outside that "we do not want a single drop of bloodshed" in response to his death.

"We do not want rockets to be fired, or a following strike on Gaza," she told the crowd.

Palestinian prisoners are seen as national heroes and any perceived threat to them while in Israeli de-

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tention can touch off tensions or violence. Israel sees Adnan and other Palestinian prisoners as security threats accused of involvement in deadly attacks or plots.

Over the past decade, Adnan became a household name in the Palestinian territories, as a symbol of steadfastness against Israel's open-ended occupation, now in its 56th year. He staged several lengthy hunger strikes over the years, including a 66-day protest in 2012, and two other strikes in 2015 and 2018 that lasted 56 and 58 days respectively. Israel released Adnan after the 2015 strike.

He is credited with turning hunger strikes into a tool of protests by Palestinian detainees and a useful bargaining chip against Israeli authorities.

According to the Palestinian Prisoners Club, which represents former and current prisoners, Adnan was arrested 12 times and spent about eight years in Israeli prisons, most of that time under administrative detention.

The number of administrative detainees has grown in the past year as Israel has carried out almost nightly arrest raids in the West Bank in the wake of a string of deadly Palestinian attacks in Israel in early 2022.

Israel says the controversial tactic helps authorities thwart attacks and hold dangerous militants without divulging incriminating material for security reasons.

Palestinians and rights groups say the system is widely abused and denies due process, with the secret nature of the evidence making it impossible for administrative detainees or their lawyers to mount a defense.

Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank have been locked in a bout of fighting for the past year. About 250 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire and 49 people have been killed in Palestinian attacks on Israelis.

On Tuesday, Israeli officials said an Israeli man was lightly wounded in a suspected Palestinian shooting attack in the West Bank.

A tense week at sea as Philippine coast guard faces China

By JIM GOMEZ, AARON FAVILA and JOEAL CALUPITAN Associated Press

ABOARD BRP MALABRIGO (AP) — When two Philippine coast guard vessels set out to patrol the volatile South China Sea recently, they had to face more than China's growing territorial ambitions.

The Associated Press and three other news agencies were invited by the Philippine coast guard two weeks ago to join a 1,670-kilometer (1,038-mile) patrol of one of the world's most fiercely contested seas.

The invitation was part of a new Philippine strategy aimed at bringing attention to China's increasingly aggressive actions in the South China Sea. China has rapidly built up its military presence in the area in recent years, pushing back other claimants like the Philippines and building artificial islands with airstrips and military garrisons. The rich fishing archipelago is believed to sit atop vast undersea deposits of oil and gas.

The Philippines dispatch regular patrols to assert their claims to the islands, spot encroachments, and resupply Filipino sailors stationed on the islands. Arrayed against far larger and more powerful fleets of Chinese coast guard vessels, navy warships and seaborne militias, the Philippine coast guard says its patrol vessels often face David and Goliath confrontations, especially near Beijing's artificial island bases.

The BRP Malabrigo and BRP Malapascua, Japanese-built 44-meter (144-foot) patrol ships, planned to make a circuit of disputed islands, islets and reefs claimed by the Philippines in the Spratly Islands, some occupied by Philippine garrisons and some by Chinese military installations.

The voyage provided a glimpse of what it's like for Filipino coast guard personnel to work on the front-lines of multiple geopolitical conflicts, while facing a constant battle against sun, sea, stress and gnawing isolation.

The sailors, a mix of sunburned veterans and sprightly recruits, brought cellphones brimming with personal photographs and videos and games.

Life on patrol was a mix of hard work and claustrophobic leisure. It was often so hot that sailors got dizzy after a few minutes outside, so crewmembers spent most of their down time between four-hour shifts in tiny, air conditioned cabins. When there was room in the mess hall, a few people might gather to watch a film or sing on the karaoke machine — a Filipino necessity. Some liked to take walks in the ship's

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narrow passages.

The two ships visited one or two destinations a day, working without interruption day and night. The easiest stops were at places occupied by Filipino forces, where the ships sent motor launches to deliver basic supplies like water, crude oil and cigarettes. At one, thirsty sailors offered dried fish in exchange for extra drinking water.

Visits to Chinese-controlled areas were harder. At one reef, the patrol encountered more than 100 small Chinese boats, suspected of belonging to the militia, anchored in groups. The Filipinos lowered launches and demanded the boats leave Philippine waters. The Chinese boats did not reply, or leave.

They faced off with the Chinese Coast Guard at Chinese-occupied Subi Reef, and later at the Second Thomas Shoal, which is occupied by Filipino sailors on a beached, crumbling navy ship, surrounded by Chinese ships.

These encounters are tense, drawn-out affairs. Chinese coast guard and navy ships shadowed the patrol for more than an hour, and over the radio accused the Filipinos of intruding into what Beijing claims as its territorial waters and ordered them by radio to leave or face unspecified counter actions.

A radio operator, holding a paper script in the corner of the bridge, asserted Philippine sovereign rights and asked the Chinese ships to stay away and abide by international anti-collision regulations.

Meanwhile, the rest of the bridge was quiet, and intensely focused. A radar operator watched intently for tiny changes in the other ship's speed or bearing. When it approached one knot faster, the commander barked an order to alter the Malabrigos's speed in response. The encounter lasted for more than an hour.

Commander Julio Colarina III, 41, was a 24-hour fixture on the bridge of the Malabrigo, where he slept on a folding bed when off duty. He's a second-generation defender of the Philippines' territorial interests. His father, a retired navy man, spent a year in the 1970s garrisoning Philippine-occupied Thitu Island.

As crew members rested between four-hour shifts on the bridge, the strains of classic rock hits like "Hotel California" could be heard from the mess hall. One night, a sailor celebrated her birthday in stark austerity: colleagues put a candle on an omelet and prepared sardines, fried fish and rice to mark the occasion.

Asked for a birthday wish, the 27-year-old said, "peace and good health always."

On April 23, the second to last day of the voyage, journalists witnessed a cliffhanger encounter when a Chinese coast guard ship blocked the Malapascua as it tried to steam toward the Second Thomas Shoal, as the crew fell silent. The Malapascua's Capt. Rodel Hernandez said a near-collision was averted when he abruptly reversed his vessel's direction and shut off its engine to bring the vessel to a full stop.

The journalists captured the dangerous confrontation on video and cameras, sparking a new round of arguments between Manila and Beijing. The Philippines criticized China for "highly dangerous maneuvers" that it said endangered the Philippine patrol vessels and its crewmembers.

China said the Filipino vessels barged into its territorial waters laden with journalists in a "premeditated provocation designed to deliberately create a friction" intending to lay the blame on Beijing.

Petty Officer 2nd Class Reggie Lobusta, who has been deployed to the disputed region multiple times in the past, said he felt like he'd just finished yet another round in a long boxing match, with no end in sight.

"There will be far worse than what we've encountered if these problems are not addressed properly," Lobusta said.

The patrols are considered some of the most difficult assignments in the Philippine Coast Guard. The entire crew was to undergo brief sessions with psychologists in a "stress debrief" after their return to shore, Colarina said, and received half a month's salary as hazard pay.

As the Malabrigo headed home after seven days, more crewmembers than usual milled and chatted on the deck, taking selfies with cellphone cameras as the sun set in the background.

"It's our morale booster — the sunsets, sunrises, dolphins and green turtles," said Lobusta. "It will break my heart when I retire and leave this ship and my second family here one final time."

Find more of AP's Asia-Pacific coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/asia-pacific>

Jews, Muslims, Sikhs get coronation role as king reaches out

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Rabbi Nicky Liss won't be watching King Charles III's coronation. He'll be doing something he considers more important: praying for the monarch on the Jewish sabbath.

On Saturday, he will join rabbis across Britain in reading a prayer in English and Hebrew that gives thanks for the new king in the name of the "one God who created us all."

Liss, the rabbi of Highgate Synagogue in north London, said British Jews appreciated Charles' pledge to promote the co-existence of all faiths and his record of supporting a multifaith society during his long apprenticeship as heir to the throne.

"When he says he wants to be a defender of faiths, that means the world because our history hasn't always been so simple and we haven't always lived freely; we haven't been able to practice our religion," Liss told The Associated Press. "But knowing that King Charles acts this way and speaks this way is tremendously comforting."

At a time when religion is fueling tensions around the world — from Hindu nationalists in India to Jewish settlers in the West Bank and fundamentalist Christians in the United States — Charles is trying to bridge the differences between the faith groups that make up Britain's increasingly diverse society.

Achieving that goal is critical to the new king's efforts to show that the monarchy, a 1,000-year-old institution with Christian roots, can still represent the people of modern, multicultural Britain.

But Charles, the supreme governor of the Church of England, faces a very different country than the one that adoringly celebrated his mother's coronation in 1953.

Seventy years ago, more than 80% of the people of England were Christian, and the mass migration that would change the face of the nation was just beginning. That figure has now dropped below half, with 37% saying they have no religion, 6.5% calling themselves Muslim and 1.7% Hindu, according to the latest census figures. The change is even more pronounced in London, where more than a quarter of the population have a non-Christian faith.

Charles recognized that change long before he became king last September.

As far back as the 1990s, Charles suggested that he would like to be known as "the defender of faith," a small but hugely symbolic change from the monarch's traditional title of "defender of the faith," meaning Christianity. It's an important distinction for a man who believes in the healing power of yoga and once called Islam "one of the greatest treasures of accumulated wisdom and spiritual knowledge available to humanity."

The king's commitment to diversity will be on display at his coronation, when religious leaders representing the Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh traditions will for the first time play an active role in the ceremonies.

"I have always thought of Britain as a 'community of communities,'" Charles told faith leaders in September.

"That has led me to understand that the Sovereign has an additional duty — less formally recognized but to be no less diligently discharged. It is the duty to protect the diversity of our country, including by protecting the space for faith itself and its practice through the religions, cultures, traditions and beliefs to which our hearts and minds direct us as individuals."

That's not an easy task in a country where religious and cultural differences sometimes boil over.

Just last summer, Muslim and Hindu youths clashed in the city of Leicester. The main opposition Labour Party has struggled to rid itself of antisemitism, and the government's counterterrorism strategy has been criticized for focusing on Muslims. Then there are the sectarian differences that still separate Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

Such tensions underscore the crucial need for Britain to have a head of state who personally works to promote inclusivity, said Farhan Nizami, director of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies.

Charles has been the center's patron for 30 years, lending his stature to Nizami's effort to build an academic hub for studying all facets of the Islamic world, including history, science and literature, as well as religion. During those years, the center moved from a nondescript wooden structure to a complex that

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has its own library, conference facilities and a mosque complete with dome and minaret.

"It is very important that we have a king who has been consistently committed to (inclusivity)," Nizami said. "It is so relevant in the modern age, with all the mobility, with the difference and diversity that exists, that the head of this state should bring people together, both by example and action."

Those actions are sometimes small. But they resonate with people like Balwinder Shukra, who saw the king a few months ago when he officially opened the Guru Nanak Gurdwara, a Sikh house of worship, in Luton, an ethnically diverse city of almost 300,000 north of London.

Shukra, 65, paused from patting out flatbreads known as chapatis for the communal meal the gurdwara serves to all comers, adjusted her floral shawl, and expressed her admiration for Charles' decision to sit on the floor with other members of the congregation.

Referring to the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book, Shukra said that "all the people (are) equal." It "doesn't matter" if you are king, she added.

Some British newspapers have suggested that Charles' desire to include other faiths in the coronation faced resistance from the Church of England, and one conservative religious commentator recently warned that a multifaith ceremony could weaken the "kingly roots" of the monarchy.

But George Gross, who studies the link between religion and monarchy, dismissed these concerns.

The crowning of monarchs is a tradition that stretches back to the ancient Egyptians and Romans, so there is nothing intrinsically Christian about it, said Gross, a visiting research fellow at King's College London. In addition, all of the central religious elements of the service will be conducted by Church of England clergy.

Representatives of other faiths have already been present at other major public events in Britain, such as the Remembrance Day services.

"These things are not unusual in more contemporary settings," he said "So I think of it the other way: Were there not to be other representatives, it would seem very odd."

Charles' commitment to a multifaith society is also a symbol of the progress that's been made in ending a rift in the Christian tradition that began in 1534, when Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church and declared himself head of the Church of England.

That split ushered in hundreds of years of tensions between Catholics and Anglicans that finally faded during the queen's reign, said Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the most senior Catholic clergyman in England. Nichols will be in the Abbey when Charles is crowned on Saturday.

"I get lots of privileges," he said cheerfully. "But this will be one of the greatest, I think, to play a part in the coronation of the monarch."

Hollywood writers, slamming 'gig economy,' to go on strike

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Television and movie writers declared late Monday that they will launch a strike for the first time in 15 years, as Hollywood girded for a walkout with potentially widespread ramifications in a fight over fair pay in the streaming era.

The Writers Guild of America said that its 11,500 unionized screenwriters will head to the picket lines on Tuesday. Negotiations between studios and the writers, which began in March, failed to reach a new contract before the writers' current deal expired just after midnight, at 12:01 a.m. PDT Tuesday. All script writing is to immediately cease, the guild informed its members.

The board of directors for the WGA, which includes both a West and an East branch, voted unanimously to call for a strike, effective at the stroke of midnight. Writers, they said, are facing an "existential crisis."

"The companies' behavior has created a gig economy inside a union workforce, and their immovable stance in this negotiation has betrayed a commitment to further devaluing the profession of writing," the WGA said in a statement. "From their refusal to guarantee any level of weekly employment in episodic television, to the creation of a 'day rate' in comedy variety, to their stonewalling on free work for screenwriters and on AI for all writers, they have closed the door on their labor force and opened the door to writing as an entirely freelance profession. No such deal could ever be contemplated by this membership."

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The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, the trade association that bargains on behalf of studios and production companies, signaled late Monday that negotiations fell short of an agreement before the current contract expired. The AMPTP said it presented an offer with “generous increases in compensation for writers as well as improvements in streaming residuals.”

In a statement, the AMPTP said that it was prepared to improve its offer “but was unwilling to do so because of the magnitude of other proposals still on the table that the guild continues to insist upon.”

The labor dispute could have a cascading effect on TV and film productions depending on how long the strike persists. But a shutdown has been widely forecast for months due to the scope of the discord. The writers last month voted overwhelming to authorize a strike, with 98% of membership in support.

At issue is how writers are compensated in an industry where streaming has changed the rules of Hollywood economics. Writers say they aren’t being paid enough, TV writer rooms have shrunk too much and the old calculus for how residuals are paid out needs to be redrawn.

“The survival of our profession is at stake,” the guild has said.

Streaming has exploded the number of series and films that are annually made, meaning more jobs for writers. But WGA members say they’re making much less money and working under more strained conditions. Showrunners on streaming series receive just 46% of the pay that showrunners on broadcast series receive, the WGA claims. Content is booming, but pay is down.

The guild is seeking more compensation on the front-end of deals. Many of the back-end payments writers have historically profited by – like syndication and international licensing – have been largely phased out by the onset of streaming. More writers — roughly half — are being paid minimum rates, an increase of 16% over the last decade. The use of so-called mini-writers rooms has soared.

The AMPTP said Monday that the primary sticking points to a deal revolved around those mini-rooms — the guild is seeking a minimum number of scribes per writer room — and duration of employment restrictions. The guild has said more flexibility for writers is needed when they’re contracted for series that have tended to be more limited and short-lived than the once-standard 20-plus episode broadcast season.

At the same time, studios are under increased pressure from Wall Street to turn a profit with their streaming services. Many studios and production companies are slashing spending. The Walt Disney Co. is eliminating 7,000 jobs. Warner Bros. Discovery is cutting costs to lessen its debt. Netflix has pumped the breaks on spending growth.

When Hollywood writers have gone on strike, it’s often been lengthy. In 1988, a WGA strike lasted 153 days. The last WGA strike went for 100 days, beginning in 2007 and ending in 2008.

The most immediate effect of the strike viewers are likely to notice will be on late-night shows and “Saturday Night Live.” All are expected to immediately go dark. During the 2007 strike, late-night hosts eventually returned to the air and improvised material. Jay Leno wrote his own monologues, a move that angered union leadership.

On Friday’s episode of “Late Night,” Seth Meyers, a WGA member who said he supported the union’s demands, prepared viewers for re-runs while lamenting the hardship a strike entails.

“It doesn’t just affect the writers, it affects all the incredible non-writing staff on these shows,” Meyers said. “And it would really be a miserable thing for people to have to go through, especially considering we’re on the heels of that awful pandemic that affected, not just show business, but all of us.”

Scripted series and films will take longer to be affected. But if a strike persisted through the summer, fall schedules could be upended. And in the meantime, not having writers available for rewrites can have a dramatic effect on quality. The James Bond film “Quantum of Solace” was one of many films rushed into production during the 2007-2008 strike with what Daniel Craig called “the bare bones of a script.”

“Then there was a writers’ strike and there was nothing we could do,” Craig later recounted. “We couldn’t employ a writer to finish it. I say to myself, ‘Never again,’ but who knows? There was me trying to rewrite scenes — and a writer I am not.”

With a walkout long expected, writers have rushed to get scripts in and studios have sought to prepare their pipelines to keep churning out content for at least the short term.

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"We're assuming the worst from a business perspective," David Zaslav, chief executive of Warner Bros. Discovery, said last month. "We've got ourselves ready. We've had a lot of content that's been produced."

Overseas series could also fill some of the void. "If there is one, we have a large base of upcoming shows and films from around the world," said Ted Sarandos, Netflix co-chief executive, on the company's earnings call in April.

Yet the WGA strike may only be the beginning. Contracts for both the Directors Guild of America and SAG-AFTRA, the actors union, expire in June. Some of the same issues around the business model of streaming will factor into those bargaining sessions. The DGA is set to begin negotiations with AMPTP on May 10.

The cost of the WGA's last strike cost Southern California \$2.1 billion, according to the Milken Institute. How painful this strike remains to be seen. But as of late Monday evening, laptops were being closed shut all over Hollywood.

"Pencils down," said "Halt and Catch Fire" showrunner and co-creator Christopher Cantwell on Twitter shortly after the strike announcement. "Don't even type in the document." _____

Follow AP Film Writer Jake Coyle on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/jakecoyleAP>

Folk singer-songwriter Gordon Lightfoot dies at 84

TORONTO (AP) — Gordon Lightfoot, the legendary folk singer-songwriter known for "If You Could Read My Mind" and "Sundown" and for songs that told tales of Canadian identity, died Monday. He was 84.

Representative Victoria Lord said the musician died at a Toronto hospital. His cause of death was not immediately available.

Considered one of the most renowned voices to emerge from Toronto's Yorkville folk club scene in the 1960s, Lightfoot recorded 20 studio albums and penned hundreds of songs, including "Carefree Highway," "Early Morning Rain" and "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald."

In the 1970s, Lightfoot garnered five Grammy nominations, three platinum records and nine gold records for albums and singles. He performed in well over 1,500 concerts and recorded 500 songs.

He toured late into his life. Just last month he canceled upcoming U.S. and Canadian shows, citing health issues.

"We have lost one of our greatest singer-songwriters," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau tweeted. "Gordon Lightfoot captured our country's spirit in his music – and in doing so, he helped shape Canada's soundscape. May his music continue to inspire future generations, and may his legacy live on forever."

Once called a "rare talent" by Bob Dylan, Lightfoot has been covered by dozens of artists, including Elvis Presley, Barbra Streisand, Harry Belafonte, Johnny Cash, Anne Murray, Jane's Addiction and Sarah McLachlan.

Most of his songs are deeply autobiographical with lyrics that probe his own experiences in a frank manner and explore issues surrounding the Canadian national identity. "Canadian Railroad Trilogy" depicted the construction of the railway.

"I simply write the songs about where I am and where I'm from," he once said. "I take situations and write poems about them."

Lightfoot's music had a style all its own. "It's not country, not folk, not rock," he said in a 2000 interview. Yet it has strains of all three.

"The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald," for instance, is a haunting tribute to the 29 men who died in the 1975 sinking of the ship in Lake Superior during a storm.

While Lightfoot's parents recognized his musical talents early, he didn't set out to become a renowned balladeer.

He began singing in his church choir and dreamed of becoming a jazz musician. At age 13, the soprano won a talent contest at the Kiwanis Music Festival, held at Toronto's Massey Hall.

"I remember the thrill of being in front of the crowd," Lightfoot said in a 2018 interview. "It was a stepping stone for me..."

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The appeal of those early days stuck and in high school, his barbershop quartet, The Collegiate Four, won a CBC talent competition. He strummed his first guitar in 1956 and began to dabble in songwriting in the months that followed. Perhaps distracted by his taste for music, he flunked algebra the first time. After taking the class again, he graduated in 1957.

By then, Lightfoot had already penned his first serious composition — “The Hula Hoop Song,” inspired by the toy that was sweeping the culture. Attempts to sell the song went nowhere so at 18, he headed to the U.S. to study music for a year. The trip was funded in part by money saved from a job delivering linens to resorts around his hometown.

Life in Hollywood wasn’t a good fit, however, and it wasn’t long before Lightfoot returned to Canada. He pledged to move to Toronto to pursue his musical ambitions, taking any job available, including a position at a bank before landing a gig as a square dancer on CBC’s “Country Hoedown.”

His first gig was at Fran’s Restaurant, a downtown family-owned diner that warmed to his folk sensibilities. It was there he met fellow musician Ronnie Hawkins.

The singer was living with a few friends in a condemned building in Yorkville, then a bohemian area where future stars including Neil Young and Joni Mitchell would learn their trade at smoke-filled clubs.

Lightfoot made his popular radio debut with the single “(Remember Me) I’m the One” in 1962, which led to a number of hit songs and partnerships with other local musicians. When he started playing the Mariposa Folk Festival in his hometown of Orillia, Ontario that same year, Lightfoot forged a relationship that made him the festival’s most loyal returning performer.

By 1964, he was garnering positive word-of-mouth around town and audiences were starting to gather in growing numbers. By the next year, Lightfoot’s song “I’m Not Sayin’” was a hit in Canada, which helped spread his name in the United States.

A couple of covers by other artists didn’t hurt either. Marty Robbins’ 1965 recording of “Ribbon of Darkness” reached No. 1 on U.S. country charts, while Peter, Paul and Mary took Lightfoot’s composition, “For Lovin’ Me,” into the U.S. Top 30. The song, which Dylan once said he wished he’d recorded, has since been covered by hundreds of other musicians.

That summer, Lightfoot performed at the Newport Folk Festival, the same year Dylan rattled audiences when he shed his folkie persona by playing an electric guitar.

As the folk music boom came to an end in the late 1960s, Lightfoot was already making his transition to pop music with ease.

In 1971, he made his first appearance on the Billboard chart with “If You Could Read My Mind.” It reached No. 5 and has since spawned scores of covers.

Lightfoot’s popularity peaked in the mid-1970s when both his single and album, “Sundown,” topped the Billboard charts, his first and only time doing so.

During his career, Lightfoot collected 12 Juno Awards, including one in 1970 when it was called the Gold Leaf.

In 1986, he was inducted into the Canadian Recording Industry Hall of Fame, now the Canadian Music Hall of Fame. He received the Governor General’s award in 1997 and was ushered into the Canadian Country Music Hall Of Fame in 2001.

Met Gala: Rihanna, Jared Leto as Choupette, Kim K. in pearls

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Rihanna shut down the Met Gala carpet Monday encased in white camellias on a jacket with a long train gown. Janelle Monáe dropped a bulky coat to reveal a see-through cage and Jeremy Pope walked in a 32-foot cape emblazoned with the visage of Karl Lagerfeld.

In the spirit of Lagerfeld himself (he was not often on time), Rihanna and her Valentino couture had the carpet to themselves save her partner, A\$AP Rocky, who wore a red tartan skirt over crystal-studded jeans with a train of his own. They showed up well past everyone else.

Around her neck was a short Bulgari necklace in Akoya cultured pearls and pearl-shaped diamonds.

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Lagerfeld was the honoree at the A-list gala with many in the crowd of about 400 dressed in vintage looks from the fashion houses where he worked during a career of more than 60 years.

But elegant wasn't entirely the hallmark of the evening. Jared Leto dressed as Choupette, Lagerfeld's beloved fluffy cat. Lil Nas X went full cat covered in crystals by Pat McGrath and Dior Men.

Bad Bunny showed up late in bright white from head to toe with a long cape also adorned with camellias, a Coco Chanel motif embraced by Lagerfeld. Monáe's look, with a black sparkly leotard underneath, was made by Thom Browne.

Cardi B first donned pink then switched to a full black ballgown with, you guessed it, camellias. Up top, she said, "is giving Karl, the house of Chanel and Karl at the same time." It was a men's white collar shirt accent with a black men's tie. The outfit in honor of Lagerfeld was done by an up-and-coming British design house, Chenpeng Studio.

"The Met Gala dress code was 'in honor of Karl' and guests definitely understood the assignment," said Alison Cohn, deputy fashion news editor for Harper's Bazaar. "They referenced the many signatures Karl Lagerfeld developed over his six-decade plus career."

Many used boucle fabric (Teyana Taylor's Thom Browne suit and Anne Hathaway's Versace safety pin number). Also adorned in camellias were Emily Blunt in a Michael Kors blouse and Adut Akech in a Carolina Herrera gown.

Dua Lipa walked in a white Chanel ballgown from the fashion house's archive and Nicole Kidman chose a look Lagerfeld himself made for her 20 years ago.

And there were some bombshells: Serena Williams wore a flapper Gucci look when she announced she's pregnant with her second child.

Lipa, a gala co-chair, wore a Tiffany & Co. diamond around her neck. She called her cream-colored dress, by Chanel from 1992, "very, very special" as it has been on her mood boards.

Claudia Schiffer wore the gown on the runway for its debut, although hers had a matching hat. Lipa's necklace in platinum included a center diamond of more than 200 carats.

Nicole Kidman said it was Lagerfeld who ignited her fashion spark. She wore a pale pink gown created by Lagerfeld for a Chanel No. 5 commercial she starred in. It's adorned with 3,000 silver crystals for the ad directed by Baz Luhrmann.

"I'm very grateful to wear it," she told The Associated Press. "He was so much a part of my life, as were his whole team. He was the one really sort of shepherded me ... in terms of my love of fashion."

Kidman topped off her look with Harry Winston diamonds.

"My favorite look was Nicole Kidman's ethereal feathered sequin Chanel gown. Typically stars wear new couture straight off the runway or have a custom look commissioned. It was a lovely statement about sustainability, proving that beautifully hand-crafted pieces never go out of style," Cohn said.

Kim Kardashian, meanwhile, went with loops and loops of pearls all over her Schiaparelli look. And Cardi B went big in pink, complete with a feathery head piece. Brittney Griner wore a warm stone shade in a suit with a long jacket by Calvin Klein, who also dressed her wife, Cherelle Griner, in a sleek strapless column dress in white onyx.

Many in the crowd counted Lagerfeld as a friend or worked with him at Chanel, Fendi, Chloe or one of the other fashion houses where he created.

And many guests wore black to walk the unusual carpet in a line design. It was a color Lagerfeld wore almost exclusively. Black-and-white combos were also plentiful.

Kristen Stewart wore the color duo in a suit with a cropped white jacket. And Cara Delevingne honored her old friend Lagerfeld with a ruffled white shirt look short in front with a train at the back. Ruffled shirts were among Lagerfeld's favorites.

The classic colors weren't for Viola Davis. She walked in a stunning neon pink strapless gown with long feathers at the bodice.

Frenchy M. Harris, CEO and founder of the online fashion site The Black Fashion Movement had one word for Davis: "Gorgeous!"

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She called Anne Hathaway's Chanel-inspired but Versace-created look with the pins and camellias at the breast "super cool and a great marriage between the brands."

Gigi Hadid wore Givenchy in black with feathers, a drop waist and sheer train in tulle. It took more than 300 hours to make. Kendall Jenner was also in black, sans pants. She wore a sparkly leotard with long sleeves that has pieces doubling as a train. On her feet were kinky, towering black boots, all courtesy of Marc Jacobs.

Jenner's high white collar was a nod to those worn by Lagerfeld. Her hair was in a high ponytail.

Rita Ora was also in black, a stunner of a peekaboo sheer look from Prabal Gurung. It was silk tulle with corset detailing and sexy draping in chiffon. One shoulder was dropped.

Margot Robbie, who stars in this summer's "Barbie" live-action film, wore a 1993 Chanel gown in black that Cindy Crawford first wore on a runway. Robbie said she was the last Chanel ambassador to be hand-picked by Lagerfeld.

"I feel really great in it. It's an honor," she said.

The invitation-only gala earned \$17.4 million last year for the museum's Costume Institute, a self-funding department with a budget dependent on the gala's success. The price of attending went up this year to \$300,000 for a table and \$50,000 for a single ticket.

The guests from fashion, film, music, theater, sports, tech and social media were asked to dress "in honor of Karl" by gala mastermind Anna Wintour, a close Lagerfeld friend who first signed on to the event in 1995 and took over the helm in 1999.

The party coincides with the Costume Institute's blockbuster spring exhibition: "Karl Lagerfeld: A Line of Beauty."

American fashion was last year's vibe. It followed gilded glamour and white tie. Camp was the theme in 2019, producing what is considered one of the wackiest displays of dress by the celebrity crowd.

Lagerfeld worked for Chanel, Fendi, Chloé, Jean Patou, Balmain, his own brand and more.

This year's five hosts include Wintour, as usual, and also Michaela Coel, longtime Chanel ambassador Penélope Cruz, and recently retired tennis superstar Roger Federer.

Cruz looked like a bride with a sheer hood on her white Chanel belted gown with silver details from spring/summer couture collection in 1988.

Asked how he got to be a Met Gala co-chair, Federer said it helps to know Wintour. He said it makes sense for athletes to be at the gala because they've become a bigger part of the fashion world in recent years.

"I think the sports people have gotten more and more fashionable," Federer told the AP. "We're fortunate to get onto covers much more frequently nowadays. Before it was always the models, the good-looking people, not the athletes."

Fendi, where Lagerfeld worked for more than 20 years, was also represented. Suki Waterhouse wore a 2019 Fendi design by Lagerfeld in silk tulle and delicate flowers and birds on sheer panels.

Lagerfeld's cat, Choupette, had been rumored to attend but her humans posted on Instagram earlier in the day the 11-year-old feline was staying put in Paris. Doja Cat's cat-eared hood on a sparkling white and silver-beaded dress was an ode by Oscar de la Renta. She wore prosthetics that gave her a feline face and claws.

Chloe Fineman carried a cat-shaped bag and Emma Chamberlain wore "Choupette blue," a light blue hue created by Lagerfeld. James Corden also showed up in the shade.

As for Leto, he swapped out his cat costume for a black caped look.

Associated Press Writer John Carucci contributed to this report.

Follow Leanne Italie on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/litalie>

7 bodies found during search for missing Oklahoma teens

HENRYETTA, Okla. (AP) — Authorities searching a rural Oklahoma property for two missing teenagers discovered the bodies of seven people Monday, including the suspected remains of the teens and a convicted sex offender who was sought along with them, the local sheriff said.

Okmulgee County Sheriff Eddy Rice said the state medical examiner will have to confirm the identities of the victims, but “we believe that we have found the persons.” He said the bodies were believed to include those of 14-year-old Ivy Webster and 16-year-old Brittany Brewer, along with Jesse McFadden, the felon authorities had said the teens were traveling with.

“We are no longer looking,” Rice said. “We believe to have found everything that we were seeking this morning. Our hearts go out to the families and friends, schoolmates and everyone else.”

He declined to provide details of how they died or other details.

The bodies were found during a search near the town of Henryetta, a town of about 6,000 located about 90 miles (145 kilometers) east of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation spokesman Gerald Davidson said.

A missing endangered person advisory had been issued earlier in the day for the two teenagers before it was canceled Monday afternoon by the Oklahoma Highway Patrol.

The advisory for Webster and Brewer had said they were reportedly seen traveling with McFadden, who was on the state’s sex offender registry. Oklahoma Department of Corrections prison records show McFadden was convicted of first-degree rape in 2003 and released in October 2020.

Court records show McFadden was scheduled to appear in court Monday for the start of a jury trial on charges of soliciting sexual conduct with a minor and possession of child pornography. A message left Monday evening with McFadden’s attorney in that case was not immediately returned.

Brittany Brewer’s father told KOTV in Tulsa that one of the bodies discovered was his daughter.

“Brittany was an outgoing person. She was actually selected to be Miss Henryetta ... coming up in July for this Miss National Miss pageant in Tulsa. And now she ain’t gonna make it because she’s dead. She’s gone,” Nathan Brewer said.

At a Monday night vigil, Brewer told hundreds of people: “It’s just a parent’s worst nightmare, and I’m living it.”

He said his daughter had aspired to be a teacher or a veterinarian.

“I am just lost,” he added.

Henryetta Public Schools posted on Facebook and its website that it is grieving over the loss of several of its students.

“Our hearts are hurting, and we have considered what would be best for our students in the coming days,” the note said. Officials said school would be in session, and mental health professionals and clergy would be on hand to help counsel students. But they said they would understand if families want to keep their children home from school.

In a separate Okmulgee County case, the bodies of four men were found Oct. 14 in the Deep Fork River in Okmulgee, a town of around 11,000 people that is about 40 miles (65 kilometers) south of Tulsa. Joseph Kennedy, 68, is facing four counts of first-degree murder in that case.

Scooby doobie don’t: Discarded joints pose hazards for dogs

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Bondi, an 8-month-old toy poodle, had just returned from a walk when he began stumbling. His head wobbled and soon he could barely stand, so his owner, Colleen Briggs, rushed him to the vet.

The good doctor quickly made a diagnosis: Bondi was stoned.

On his walk, a sniff must have led Bondi to a discarded joint, which he ate.

“He was just doing his usual — exploring everything, sniffing everything,” said Briggs, who began to notice the pot shops sprouting up around New York City, the frequent whiffs of marijuana while circling

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her Manhattan neighborhood and the unfinished joints now littering sidewalks.

In places like New York City, where the first legal recreational pot dispensary opened last year, users can smoke it in the open. As a result, more dogs are coming across — and eating — discarded joints and edibles, prompting alarm among veterinarians and pet owners who blame the steep rise in poisonings on smokers oblivious to the harm they can do by littering.

Marijuana poisonings, which are almost never fatal, were once rare among pets, even when medical dispensaries started opening, according to Dr. Amy Attas, a New York City veterinarian. Until recently, many occurred at home, when pets got into their owners' stashes.

"The reason we're seeing so many cases is that people are using marijuana on the street and then discarding the unwanted ends of their joints," Attas said. "And that's a real problem because dogs will eat those."

In the first three months of the year, she had already seen six cases, which is about the same number she's treated over the past three decades. Multiply that by the number of vets working in New York City, she said, and the result underscores the widening problem.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals said cases are rising nationwide. Last year, there was an 11% increase from the roughly 6,200 cases reported in 2021, and over the past five years, there has been a 300% increase.

"To me, it is unbelievable how prevalent this now is," said Attas.

Twenty-one states have legalized the recreational use of cannabis, and in large urban areas like New York, there's no escaping the whiff of pot in public.

In many cases, owners are unaware that their dogs have eaten a leftover joint until they begin showing signs of toxicity. Even then, owners might not understand what is ailing their pets.

Sue Scott was in a panic when her 9-month-old fawn pug, Circe, collapsed after a recent walk. Circe's paws splayed out on the floor, her head shook to-and-fro and she drooled.

"A million things were running through my head," said Scott, 68. Marijuana poisoning was not among them. "I would never had thought that," she said.

Scott made a video call to Dr. Attas, who said Circe was showing all the signs of being high. She now keeps Circe on a shorter leash, mindful of where she pokes her nose.

"I don't know if you know pugs — they're constantly on the lookout for their next morsel," said Scott, who has owned four other pugs, none of whom ever returned home stoned. "But sometimes it's pretty tough to control them because they are so fast. They'll just dart at something."

Although dogs rarely die from marijuana poisoning, treatment can be expensive, sometimes requiring a trip to the animal emergency room, a stomach pump and intravenous fluids.

The stress on the patient and its owner is also enormous.

Bondi has been poisoned three times, the first time last fall, said his owner, Briggs.

Even as Briggs grew more vigilant when walking her pup, she acknowledged that she must have gotten distracted when Bondi became sick a second time. That time, she let Bondi ride out his high.

"Walking him ... it's just a really intense situation. So I'm always looking on the ground, and it's just everywhere now," she said of the spent joints that she and Bondi come across on walks.

"One time," Briggs said, "I caught him and grabbed it out of his mouth."

Chinese electric vehicle brands expand to global markets

By JOE McDONALD and YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writers

YOKOHAMA, Japan (AP) — Osamu Furukawa has driven lots of Japanese cars for his business converting classic gasoline-powered models to electric. But his favorite ride is an import: A battery-powered SUV from China's BYD Auto.

BYD Auto is part of a wave of Chinese electric car exporters that are starting to compete with Western and Japanese brands in their home markets. They bring fast-developing technology and low prices that Tesla Inc.'s chief financial officer says "are scary."

Furukawa said he ordered an ATTO 3 when it went on sale Jan. 31, for its user-friendly features and

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appealing price of 4.4 million yen (\$33,000) — or about one-quarter less than a Tesla.

"It's perfect," Furukawa said in his office in Yokohama, southwest of Tokyo.

Other ambitious Chinese EV exporters include NIO, Geely Group's Zeekr and Ora, a unit of SUV maker Great Wall Motors.

Some compete on price. Others emphasize performance and features, putting pressure on Western and Japanese premium brands.

NIO Inc., which has persuaded buyers in China to pay Tesla-level sticker prices of up to 555,000 yuan (\$80,000), says its latest SUV goes on sale this year in Europe. The ES6 boasts voice-activated controls and a range of 610 kilometers (380 miles) on a charge.

"We are very confident the ES6 will compete in this premium SUV market," NIO's founder and CEO, William Li, said in an interview at the Shanghai auto show.

Sales of battery-powered vehicles and gasoline-electric hybrids in China almost doubled last year to 6.9 million vehicles, or half the global total.

That was supported by multibillion-dollar subsidies from the ruling Communist Party, which is trying to make China a creator of clean energy and other technologies. That rattles U.S. and European leaders who see China as a strategic and industrial competitor.

Chinese brands are "serious competition," according to David Leah, an analyst for GlobalData.

They have "more competitive battery technology" and can "achieve greater economies of scale," Leah said in an email.

BYD Auto, owned by battery maker BYD Co., edged ahead of Tesla in total 2022 sales at 1.9 million vehicles. Half were gasoline-electric hybrids, while Tesla's fleet is pure electric.

"We have a lot of respect for the car companies in China," Tesla CEO Elon Musk said in a Jan. 25 conference call with financial analysts. "They work the hardest and they work the smartest."

Chinese brands are developing EVs to compete without subsidies as Beijing shifts the burden to the industry by requiring them to earn credits for selling electrics. Prices start as low as 100,000 yuan (\$14,500) for a compact SUV with a 400-kilometer (250-mile) range on one charge.

"The Chinese are scary," Tesla CFO Zachary Kirkhorn said on the analyst call.

Chinese EV brands mix research and design centers in the United States and Europe with factories in China.

Geely's Zeekr plans to launch an all-electric sedan and an SUV this year in the Netherlands and Sweden. Its mini-United Nations of Chinese and European designers is in Gothenberg, Sweden, adjacent to Volvo Cars, another Geely brand, while its factories are in China.

"Our ambition is to be a key player in electrified mobility in Europe within this decade," said Zeekr CEO Spiros Fotinos, a Toyota and Lexus veteran. With a "clear global ambition," he said, "we're looking at the opportunities and right timing for other markets."

CEO Carlos Tavares of Stellantis, the parent company of Chrysler, Peugeot and FIAT, warned in January that Europe needs a strategy to compete with China's lower prices. European-made electrics cost 40% more than Chinese models, according to Tavares.

"It's a very bleak scenario," Tavares told German magazine *Automobilwoche*. "But it doesn't have to go that way."

BYD Auto's exports quadrupled last year to 55,916 sedans, SUVs and hatchbacks. Most went to India, Thailand, Brazil and other developing markets. BYD announced a 1,000-vehicle sale last year to Mexico's VEMO for the biggest EV taxi fleet outside China.

State-owned BAIC, headquartered in Beijing, said a dealer in Jordan ordered 1,000 units of its compact EU5 sedan in January. The company said it plans to launch two to three more electric vehicles in Latin America, Southeast Asia and Europe.

What about the United States, the biggest, richest market?

Chinese EV brands are skittish about a sprawling country that demands big investments in dealerships and charging networks, especially while Washington and Beijing are feuding over security, technology

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and human rights.

"This is not an easy task," said NIO's Li. "Our products and services need to be prepared."

BYD Auto has been in the U.S. market for a decade selling battery-powered transit buses assembled at a factory northeast of Los Angeles. It is "still in the process" of deciding whether to sell SUVs and sedans to Americans, the company said in a written response to questions.

Political tensions "make it difficult for a Chinese company to launch, EV or otherwise," in the United States, Leah said.

In Europe, Great Wall's Ora sells its 03 model starting at 140,000 yuan (\$20,000). Ora tries to stand out among dozens of fledgling brands by marketing its cars as being designed for women, their body sizes and daily needs.

"This is a second or third car for a household. It can be used by a wife or daughter to commute to work, to go out with friends or to go shopping," said Ora's deputy general manager, Tan Jian.

In Europe, BYD Auto has partnerships with dealership chains in Britain, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. The company says it also has delivered cars in Belgium, Denmark and Austria. It has a deal with European rental company SIXT that BYD says will lead to sales of up to 100,000 vehicles over the next six years.

In Japan, BYD Auto plans to have 100 showrooms by the end of 2025. Its Dolphin hatchback and Seal sedan are due to hit the Japanese market this year. The company says it also has exported some 4,000 ATTO 3s to Australia.

Furukawa's OZ Co. converts Volkswagen Beetles and other classic models by replacing gasoline engines with batteries and electric motors. Furukawa said he drives his ATTO 3 every day and has gone as far as Osaka, 400 kilometers (250 miles) away.

BYD Auto's Yokohama showroom, which opened Feb. 2, is surrounded by dealerships for established brands including Toyota, Nissan, BMW, Volkswagen and Chevrolet.

A married father of one said he looked at Japanese models but bought an ATTO 3 for its roominess and price.

"I like the ride, and it's easy to drive," said the buyer, who asked to be identified only by his surname, Ohta. "There are so many good features."

Ohta's father had a "negative reaction" about BYD being from China, which has a history of strained relations with Japan. But Ohta said his job in the electronic games industry has taught him to respect Chinese innovation.

"They are coming out with excellent products," Ohta said. "I have respect for the nation."

McDonald reported from Shanghai.

Tony nominations: It's reckoning time for a crowded Broadway

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Broadway has taken audiences to fascinating places this season, from a female-led retelling of the events of 1776 to the enlightened land of Camelot and from a lifeboat bobbing in the Pacific Ocean to a prison in Georgia just before World War I.

On Tuesday, all those places and more will be hoping to attract many more visitors with a coveted Tony Award nomination. "Funny Girl" star Lea Michele and last year's Tony-winner Myles Frost from "MJ" will announce the list. Even a nomination can lure uncertain patrons.

There are few certainties, but critical musical darling "Kimberly Akimbo," with Victoria Clark playing a teen who ages four times faster than the average human, is likely to earn one of the prized best new musical nods, as should "Some Like It Hot," a musical adaptation of the cross-dressing movie comedy that starred Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon.

Likely nominations in the play category are Tom Stoppard's "Leopoldstadt," which explores Jewish identity with an intergenerational story, and "Fat Ham" James Ijames' Pulitzer Prize-winning adaptation of Shake-

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speare's "Hamlet" set at a Black family's barbecue in the modern South. Also in shoo-in territory is "Prima Facie," which deals with sexual assault and the failure of the legal system to reckon with it.

Two jukebox shows will hope to earn nominations for best new musical — "A Beautiful Noise, The Neil Diamond Musical," a stage biography of the sing-songwriter who has had dozens of top-40 hits, and "& Juliet," which reimagines "Romeo and Juliet" and adds some of the biggest pop Max Martin hits of the past few decades.

This was a Broadway season that had two well-received Stephen Sondheim revivals — "Sweeney Todd" with Annaleigh Ashford and Josh Groban and a star-studded "Into the Woods," which are both up for musical revivals. Another likely entry in that category is "Parade," a doomed musical love story set against the real backdrop of a murder and lynching in Georgia in pre-World War I.

Andrew Lloyd Webber gave audiences a new show — the frothy and widely panned "Bad Cinderella" — even as he bid farewell to his long-running "The Phantom of the Opera." And there was a lush revival of "Camelot," this time with Aaron Sorkin reinventing the 1960 King Arthur musical.

Ariana DeBose will host the June 11 awards celebration from New York City's United Palace theater live on CBS and on Paramount+. It is her second-straight stint as host.

CBS and the streaming service Pluto TV will partner to present "The Tony Awards: Act One," a 90-minute pre-show of live content, including the first round of awards.

Broadway had some very serious works this season, like the new plays "Cost of Living" and "The Kite Runner" and revivals of "Topdog/Underdog" and "Death of a Salesman" led by Wendell Pierce. A revival of "Parade," about the lynching of a Jewish businessman starring Ben Platt, was well-received.

The season had an element of the fantastical in a puppet-heavy adaptation of the lifeboat book "Life of Pi," satire in "The Thanksgiving Play" and pure silliness in "Shucked" and "Peter Pan Goes Wrong."

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>

Can Biden win again? Here's how past incumbents fared

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — No president wants to give up the power and prestige that comes with the office after only one term, and Joe Biden is no exception. He's pushing forward even though polls show a majority of Americans don't want to see him run again.

We went back to look at when modern presidents announced their decisions to seek a second term, what their Gallup approval ratings were at the time and how things turned out for them.

One theme: Primary battles are a sign of whether a president will win reelection. That's good news for Biden, who appears to have avoided any significant challengers.

HARRY TRUMAN

He was vice president when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt died in 1945, near the end of World War II. Truman decided to run for a full term of his own, and he announced his candidacy on March 8, 1948. He had an approval rating of 53% in a poll conducted two months earlier. Truman was expected to lose the general election to Thomas Dewey, a Republican, but he pulled off a narrow victory.

Truman announced on March 29, 1952, that he would not seek a second full term after losing in the New Hampshire primary to Sen. Estes Kefauver of Tennessee. His approval rating had sunk to 22% amid economic trouble and the Korean War.

DWIGHT EISENHOWER

Eisenhower, a Republican, had an approval rating of 75% shortly before he announced his reelection campaign on Feb. 29, 1956. He had suffered a heart attack months earlier at age 64, leading to questions over whether he would run.

As the former supreme allied commander during World War II, Eisenhower convinced Americans that he was the right leader on the world stage. He defeated Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson.

JOHN F. KENNEDY

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Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, before he had a chance to run for a second term.

LYNDON B. JOHNSON

Johnson was vice president at the time of Kennedy's death, and he swiftly ran for his first full term in 1964, winning a landslide victory over Republican Barry Goldwater. However, the Democrat's popularity slipped badly over the Vietnam War and domestic turmoil.

It became clear that Johnson was at risk of losing his party's nomination in 1968 after Eugene McCarthy's strong showing in the New Hampshire primary. Soon after, Johnson shocked the country by announcing on March 31, 1968, that he would not seek a second term. His approval rating was only 36% that month.

RICHARD NIXON

Nixon had an approval rating of 50% when he announced his reelection campaign on Jan. 7, 1972. The Watergate break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters occurred that summer, but the scandal didn't gain enough momentum to drag him down.

Nixon, a Republican, defeated George McGovern, a Democrat, in a landslide. However, he would not finish his second term, resigning in 1974 after revelations about Watergate caught up with him.

GERALD FORD

Ford, a Republican, became president when Nixon stepped down, and he announced that he would run for a full term of his own on July 8, 1975. He had a 52% approval rating the month before.

He faced discontent over inflation and controversy from his decision to pardon Nixon, and he lost the election to Jimmy Carter, a Democrat.

JIMMY CARTER

Carter announced his reelection campaign on Dec. 4, 1979. His approval rating had just hit 51%. However, the American people had grown weary of inflation, an energy crisis and a hostage crisis in Iran. Carter was wounded by a primary challenge from Sen. Ted Kennedy, and he was ultimately defeated by Ronald Reagan, a Republican.

RONALD REAGAN

Reagan announced his reelection bid on Jan. 29, 1984. His approval rating was 52% that month. Despite concerns about his age — he was 73 and the oldest president in history at the time — Reagan handily defeated Walter Mondale, a Democrat.

GEORGE H.W. BUSH

Bush's popularity skyrocketed after the Gulf War, when U.S. forces pushed Iraq out of Kuwait. However, his approval rating had subsided to 65% by the time he announced his reelection campaign on Oct. 11, 1991.

Pat Buchanan challenged Bush in the Republican primary. Although Bush won the nomination, his shot at a second term dimmed amid an economic downturn. He ultimately lost to Bill Clinton, a Democrat.

BILL CLINTON

Clinton's approval rating was 47% when he announced that he would run for reelection on April 14, 1995. Democrats had suffered a wipeout midterm election in 1994, leading some to question whether Clinton would be a one-term president. But he rebounded with the help of a growing economy, and he defeated Bob Dole, a Republican.

GEORGE W. BUSH

The Sept. 11 attacks of 2001 led Bush, a Republican, to invade Afghanistan, followed by another war in Iraq. One month after U.S. forces entered Baghdad, Bush announced he would run for reelection on May 16, 2003. His approval rating was 69% that month. He defeated John Kerry, a Democrat.

BARACK OBAMA

Obama, a Democrat, had a 48% approval rating when he announced his reelection campaign on April 4, 2011. He struggled to convince Americans that the economy was improving after the financial collapse and subsequent recession, but he ultimately defeated Mitt Romney, a Republican.

DONALD TRUMP

Trump, a Republican, announced that he would run for reelection on June 18, 2019. The previous month, his approval rating was 41%. He was impeached for the first time at the end of the year, and then the

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coronavirus pandemic stalled the economy. Joe Biden, a Democrat, defeated Trump, who tried to prevent the peaceful transfer of power.

JOE BIDEN

Biden announced his reelection campaign on April 25. His approval rating was 40% the previous month. Biden would be 86 at the end of a second term, leading to fears that he's too old to keep such a demanding job.

However, Biden has not drawn any significant primary challengers. The only Democrats running are Marianne Williamson and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Meanwhile, Trump is leading in Republican primary polls as he seeks the party's nomination, raising the potential for a rematch with Biden.

Associated Press writer Emily Swanson contributed to this report.

Met Gala 2023 live updates: Fashion highlights from carpet

NEW YORK (AP) — Fashion's biggest night is underway — after all, it is the first Monday in May. Follow along for real-time updates on the 2023 Met Gala from The Associated Press. We'll be bringing you news in all formats, all day and all night, from the carpet at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and behind the scenes. This year's theme revolves around late fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld.

Live updates are contributed by Leanne Italie, Jocelyn Noveck, Beatrice Dupuy, Lindsey Bahr, Elise Ryan, Mallika Sen and other AP journalists.

IS RIHANNA AT THE MET GALA?

Yes! About an hour and a half after reporters were told to expect one more guest in about 15 minutes, Rihanna herself arrived at the Met Gala. She ascended the steps in voluminous white bedecked with rosettes that doubled as a hood, accompanied by A\$AP Rocky in a kilt-type layer over jeans (reminiscent of mid-aughts Disney Channel couture).

It's just May and it's already been a year of grand entrances for Rihanna, who revealed her pregnancy during her Super Bowl appearance in February.

MET GALA COCKROACH, 2023-2023

The cockroach has been stepped on. While it's possible the cockroach was born in 2022, given that they have an adult lifespan of around six months, we reckoned that lifespan shortens significantly in New York City.

IS RIHANNA AT THE MET GALA?

No. At least, not yet. It's 10:05 p.m.

MEANWHILE, A CUTE MOMENT

While we wait, here's a cute moment witnessed by AP's Brooke Lefferts: Dwyane Wade and Gabrielle Union departed and then Britney Griner walked down the Met steps to cheers. Wade came back in to hug Griner, chatting with her and then FaceTiming his daughter on his phone. He did a pan as all the press yelled and waved: "Thanks," he said, "I wanted to show my daughter what the Met Gala was like."

Wade has two daughters, 4-year-old Kaavia and 15-year-old Zaya, who is trans. Wade recently said in an interview with Rachel Nichols that his family left Florida because his family wouldn't be accepted, a reference to the state's pursuit of anti-LGBTQ+ policies.

MYSTERY AT THE MET

It's nearly 9:30 p.m. All the reporters at the Met Gala are in a holding pattern. We've been told someone big is coming, and we've been told that for the last 40 minutes or so. But the identity and the location of the final guest remains a mystery: Is it Rihanna, known for a grand — and late — entrance? Is it Chou-

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pette, coming to extract revenge on Jared Leto? Is it the cockroach that AP's Beatrice Dupuy just saw scurry up the stairs?

"Who are you wearing?" a reporter yelled. The roach did not respond.

Inside the Met Gala, with cocktails over and done, most had gone inside for dinner. Left behind were the journalists like AP's Jocelyn Noveck, awaiting the whoever — or whatever — is coming.

DRESSED TO (THE) NINE(S)

It's 8:50 p.m. and cocktails are long over inside the Met. Dinner was supposed to start at 8 p.m. But it seems as if the carpet has some life still left in it, even with appearances by what would be showstoppers — like Jeremy Pope in a massive Karl Lagerfeld cape — at any other event already gone by.

THE BUZZ ABOUT FLORENCE PUGH

Florence Pugh did not hold back for her Met Gala debut. The 27-year-old actor surprised onlookers with a shaved head, adorned with a sky-high feathered headpiece by Valentino. Her gown, also Valentino, was white with a black ribbon.

Pugh has sported several showstopping Valentino looks lately, including at the Venice Film Festival premiere of "Don't Worry Darling" and then again at the Oscars earlier this year. Last week she revealed that she was the new star of Valentino's Rockstud bag campaign.

But it was her hair that drew the most attention. Some onlookers wondered if it was a wig.

In an interview last week with the New York Times she teased that her Met Gala look was going to be "big."

"The idea is to be as bold as possible. I love the power that it gives me. I love how it sparks conversation," Pugh said. "Every time I step out in whatever dress, that's a version of me that I'm really proud of. So it doesn't matter if people don't necessarily like it. I don't think anything that I do has to be 100% loved. Things being up for debate is good. It means people are interested."

Just last week, Pugh attended an event with a long blonde bob with bangs.

BRITNEY GRINER SPEAKS OUT

Brittney Griner knows she has an advantage over other Americans being detained overseas as a public figure with access to media.

The WNBA star used that influence on the carpet at the Met Gala to talk about helping support families working to free Americans jailed in foreign prisons through the organization Bring Our Families Home, dressed in Calvin Klein and alongside her wife

The 6-foot, 9-inch Griner is finally taking on a more public profile after being traded for Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout on Dec. 8, 10 months after she was arrested at a Moscow airport. Authorities said a search of her luggage revealed vape cartridges containing cannabis oil. She later pleaded guilty and was sentenced to nine years in prison.

Griner recently appeared at an event with Al Sharpton and attended the White House Correspondents' Association dinner in Washington on Saturday. She had her first news conference since her release in preparation for the upcoming basketball season, which starts May 19.

PRECIOUS LEE ON FATPHOBIA

Model Precious Lee only had only positive things to say about Karl Lagerfeld's designs Monday at the Met Gala. "It's alluring, seductive, captivating, timeless, elevated," Lee told The Associated Press.

Lee, a plus-sized model, wore a black Fendi gown with a hot pink Fendi baguette purse for the night.

She did not have any direct comment about Lagerfeld's comments about fat people, but simply said, "I'm fat. Always have been, always will be."

Lagerfeld was not shy about his own fatphobia and did not think he should have to cast models of different sizes in his shows.

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SERENA WILLIAMS PREGNANT, TOO!

Serena Williams and Alexis Ohanian announced they were expecting a baby during a Vogue livestream interview with La La Anthony.

The tennis superstar announced she would retire from the sport in August, saying she wanted to focus on her business interests — and having another child.

Williams and Ohanian beamed as they told Anthony there were three of them up there for the interview. Then Ohanian and Anthony both offered to have a drink on Williams' behalf inside.

The couple has a 5-year-old daughter, Olympia. Williams actually announced her intention to step away from tennis in an essay for — where else? — Vogue.

Earlier in the night, Karlie Kloss also announced she was pregnant.

WHO'S THAT CAT?

New York's rat czar can rest easy — the cats have overrun the Met. There's still no Choupette (how many times can we link to our story on her absence?), but the attendees are stepping up:

1. Jared Leto talked to AP's John Carucci as Choupette. He didn't just channel her spirit from across the ocean — that was him in a giant, white fursuit complete with heart-melting eyes. At some point, though, the head came off, at which point it looked alarmingly like a medieval battle trophy.

2. Lil Nas X talked to cameras in meows. If you speak Cat, help meow-t. The singer's look was "crystalized cat," created by Pat McGrath and Dior Men.

CORRECTION: A previous version of this item said Leto told the AP he lost a bet. He, in fact, said "C'est moi, Choupette." ("It's me, Choupette").

DOJA CAT. THAT'S THE HEADLINE.

Doja Cat leaned into her name and love of cats for her first Met Gala look. The rapper arrived on the carpet with makeup and prosthetics that gave her a feline's face, cat claws for her nails and sequined dress with cat ears.

"I'm just really happy about it and I feel sexy," she said of the look.

The makeup took 45 minutes to an hour and getting the dress on took about 20 minutes.

Doja Cat said the inspiration for her look came immediately when she heard this year's theme, which honors the late designer Karl Lagerfeld, who counted among his many muses his cat Choupette.

"We just went for it," she said.

A viewer of AP's livestream of departures from the nearby Mark Hotel could purr-dict that something was afoot. Doja left ensconced in a phalanx of umbrellas, much to the chagrin of the present fans, photographers and video journalists.

ACCESSORIES JOURNALISM

It's all in the details. Some notable accessories on the carpet:

3. Chloe Fineman's cat-shaped bag, a Choupette substitute (we're really sad the cat didn't come, if you couldn't tell. This isn't an accessory, but Emma Chamberlain wore "Choupette blue," by the way)

4. Rita Ora's long, jeweled chain nails

5. Irina Shayk's ballet flats

6. David Byrne's bicycle, complete with a handbasket

7. Chloe Malle's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" purse

8. An unrecognizably blonde Jessica Chastain's sunglasses (that she was asked to remove because no one could tell who she was)

SIGH: WHO WORE IT BEST?

What would Karl say? Actor and filmmaker Olivia Wilde and Margaret Zhang, Vogue China's editor-in-chief, showed up to the Met Gala in what appeared to be the same Chloe dress in different colors. Wilde's was white and Zhang's was black, but both had a gold embellishment that resembled a guitar on their torsos.

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The fashion faux pas caught fire on social media as people pulled out old jokes about “the dress” that some people saw as blue and black and some people saw as white and gold.

KARLIE KLOSS’ SECRET PLUS-ONE

No one gets an automatic plus-one to the Met Gala — unless you’re Karlie Kloss. Accompanied by her husband Josh Kushner, Kloss revealed her pregnancy in an interview with Emma Chamberlain on the Vogue livestream — much to the host’s excitement.

Kloss and Kushner also have a son, born in 2021.

BOB IGER ALL SMILES AMID LAYOFFS AT HAUS OF MOUSE

Disney CEO Bob Iger was all smiles on the Met Gala carpet amid massive layoffs at the company and a lawsuit against Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis on Wednesday over the Republican’s takeover of its theme park district, alleging the governor waged a “targeted campaign of government retaliation” after the company opposed a law critics call “Don’t Say Gay.”

Iger said the Met Gala is “one of the best nights of the year.” Iger said that the Met Gala may be second to the happiest place on earth but that it’s “the happiest night on earth.”

When asked about the lawsuit Iger told the AP that he had nothing more to say “than what we’ve already said.”

The Walt Disney Co. last week also went through a second round of layoffs this year in an effort to cut 7,000 jobs before the summer.

HOPE IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS — AND SO IS GISELE

Gisele Bündchen looked happy and confident on the Met Gala carpet, wearing a white sequined Chanel gown with a white feathered cape draped on her shoulders with her hair in long, beachy waves.

The supermodel wore the gown previously, in 2007, for a Harper’s Bazaar Korea shoot, shot on location by Lagerfeld.

The last time Bündchen attended the Met Gala was in 2019 with then-husband Tom Brady. The pair divorced in October.

MICHAELA COEL IS HERSELF

“What I like about you is you’re unafraid to be yourself.” That’s what Michaela Coel said Anna Wintour told her when she asked why she was picked as a co-chair of this year’s gala. Coel told Vogue livestream host La La Anthony that Wintour likened the British multihyphenate to Lagerfeld in that way.

“I’m just out here being myself,” Coel declared, clad in a Schiaparelli dress with more than 130,000 crystals and chain embellishment.

QUINTA BRUNSON DID HER HOMEWORK

On brand for her “Abbott Elementary” character, Quinta Brunson knows her fashion and studied up before her first Met Gala.

The writer-actor says her dress was inspired by a piece in Karl Lagerfeld’s 1992 collection, while her hair inspiration came from one of the late fashion designer’s 2003 shows.

Asked how she felt about attending her first Met Gala, Brunson says, “I’m just speechless. I’m just really happy to be here.”

The Emmy winner has become a fixture recently in New York’s fashion world, attending several shows during February’s fashion week.

On the eve of a possible writers strike, the proud WGA member said: “No one wants a strike but I hope that we’re able to rectify this. Whatever that means.”

NICOLE KIDMAN CREDITS KARL

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"I'm wearing a dress that Karl designed for me 20 years ago. I'm very grateful to wear it. He was so much a part of my life as were his whole team," Nicole Kidman said. "He was the one really sort of shepherded me ... in terms of my love of fashion."

In 2004, the Australian actor appeared in a three-minute Chanel No. 5 commercial shot by director Baz Luhrmann. Lagerfeld designed the costumes and also appeared in the short.

PENÉLOPE CRUZ FEELS LUCKY

Actor Penélope Cruz, one of this year's Met Gala co-chairs, said she felt lucky and privileged to be part of group honoring a genius, the late designer Karl Lagerfeld, who she said she was lucky to call a friend.

"He really deserves this and not only because of his talent and his generosity," Cruz said. "I know people at Chanel for almost 30 years. I know, like whoever is and has been there for so long, they loved him so much. It's not just the ones at the top."

Cruz, who has an ongoing relationship with Chanel, said that everyone at the house is treated with respect. On Monday she wore a hooded, sheer, white gown by Chanel.

"I'm proud to be working with a brand that has those values," she said.

Lagerfeld transformed the historic fashion brand but also was a controversial figure for his views on fatness, gay men who want to adopt children, migrants, sexual assault survivors, the #MeToo movement and "ugly" people.

ROGER FEDERER, A LA MODE

Asked how he got to be a Met Gala co-chair, tennis great Roger Federer says it helps to know Anna Wintour.

Federer is one of the evening's chairs and among the early arrivals, walked up the Met's carpeted steps a few minutes after fellow co-chair Dua Lipa arrived.

The tennis star says it makes sense for athletes to be at the Met Gala because they've become a bigger part of the fashion world in recent years.

"I think the sports people have gotten more and more fashionable," Federer told the AP. "We're fortunate to get onto covers much more frequently nowadays. Before it was always the models, the good-looking people, not the athletes."

"Life has been so intertwined between sports and fashion in recent years, so it's nice to come out on a type of red carpet like this," he said before ascending the steps.

DUA LIPA IS VERY SPECIAL

Met Gala co-chair Dua Lipa wore a Tiffany diamond around her neck that she called "very special" and that she hoped shimmered for the night. The singer's cream-colored dress, by Chanel from 1992, was also "very, very special" as it has been on her mood boards, she said. Claudia Schiffer wore the gown on the runway for its debut, although hers had a matching hat.

ANNA WINTOUR ON HER FRIEND KARL

Karl Lagerfeld was "a very kind person," Anna Wintour — Vogue's editor-in-chief and the host and mastermind behind the gala — said when asked what people misunderstand about the late designer.

She also said she hoped "he would understand how many people love and respect him."

Wintour was escorted by actor Bill Nighy.

BOTTLE EPISODE

More on the decor, courtesy the Costume Institute:

"Each side of the red carpet tent is lined with trompe l'oeil panels inspired by 18th century French decorative arts, which Lagerfeld collected. The traditional hedges of greenery and florals are replaced this year with light installations comprised of recycled water bottles lit with a blue glow. Matching chandeliers also hang above the carpet. The Great Hall information desk is transformed into a cylindrical-shaped architec-

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tural installation, also comprised of recycled water bottles lit with a blue hue.”

MAKING ITS MARK

The Mark Hotel has become an integral part of the Met Gala fabric. Located one avenue and about four blocks away from the museum, it bills itself as “New York’s most boldly lavish hotel” and it’s where many high-profile guests get ready for the gala. There’s no chance of getting a room there tonight, but fans and photogs alike are lining the entrance to capture departures. We even have a livestream up right now.

RED CARPETS ARE SO LAST YEAR

You’d be forgiven for thinking the Met Gala seemingly followed in the Oscars’ footsteps with a more champagne-colored path into the exclusive party.

Garnished with red and blue lines snaking up the famed stairs, the Met Gala carpet also pays tribute to the Karl Lagerfeld exhibit inside, which “centers first and foremost on the dichotomy of the curved ‘S’ line (think romantic, decorative) and the straight line (modern, minimalist), with one curved wall and one straight wall in each gallery,” according to AP’s Jocelyn Noveck.

But the Oscars’ departure from the typical red this year actually came courtesy creative consultants Lisa Love, a longtime Vogue contributor, and Raúl Ávila — the creative director of none other than, you guessed it, the Met Gala.

The carpet’s design shows one of Japanese architect Tadao Ando’s original sketches for the exhibition, a publicist for the Costume Institute said.

PEEK AT THE GUEST LIST

The worlds of fashion, Hollywood, sports and music are set to collide at the Met Gala tonight.

There will be supermodels, including Amber Valletta, Kate Moss, Naomi Campbell, Carolyn Murphy, Emily Ratajkowski and Gigi Hadid walking alongside sports icons like Serena Williams, host Roger Federer, Dwyane Wade, Russell Westbrook, Patrick Mahomes and Andy Roddick. Along those lines: Yes, Gisele Bündchen will be there; no, Tom Brady isn’t on the list.

Stars from hit shows like “Succession,” including Jeremy Strong and Alexander Skarsgård and “The Last of Us,” with Bella Ramsey and Pedro Pascal are expected, as are several recent Oscar winners like “Everything Everywhere All At Once’s” Ke Huy Quan and Michelle Yeoh.

Broadway will be well represented with Phillipa Soo, Ben Platt, Lea Michele and Jonathan Groff as well as a host of movie stars, including the likes of Margot Robbie, Anne Hathaway, Jennifer Lopez, Rami Malek, Robert Pattinson, Hugh Jackman and Florence Pugh, directors (Baz Luhrmann, Taika Waititi, Olivia Wilde and Sofia Coppola among them) and even executives, like Disney CEO Bob Iger and Interscope co-founder Jimmy Iovine.

There will be designers like Miuccia Prada, Stella McCartney, Vera Wang, Donatella Versace, Prabal Gurung, Tommy Hilfiger and Alessandro Michele, heiresses like Paris Hilton and Ivy Getty and actual royalty, like Charlotte Casiraghi. And from the music world, Billie Eilish, FINNEAS, Lil Nas X, host Dua Lipa, Tems and Usher.

WHO’S MISSING FROM THE GUEST LIST?

The guest list handed out to reporters was more than seven pages long — but there were some big names missing. The mononymous showstoppers from previous years — Beyoncé, Rihanna and Zendaya — were all absent.

Blake Lively already told us she wouldn’t make it this year. Lively’s good friend Taylor Swift also wasn’t on the list; while her Eras tour is in full swing, she played Atlanta last night and isn’t due to play Nashville until Friday.

Two of Lagerfeld’s own “chouettes” (human edition), Vanessa Paradis and daughter Lily-Rose Depp, were also not on the list. But surprises are never out of the question.

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KARDASHIAN WATCH

Unfounded rumors flew about whether the Kardashians were even invited to this year's Met Gala; Kim put them at rest when she posted to Instagram a research trip to Paris (complete with a stop to pay fealty to Choupette).

But who else from the Kardashian-Jenner clan made the cut? According to the guest list provided to press at the venue, Kendall Jenner and Kylie Jenner are the only other attendees slated to come.

But what about the extended universe? Kendall's rumored beau Bad Bunny is on the list; Kylie's — one Timothée Chalamet, a recent Met Gala host — is not. Also on the list: Kim's ex, Pete Davidson. The pair walked the carpet last year, with Kim clad in the famous Marilyn Monroe dress.

DRESS TO IM-PRESS

The press line opened hours before the stars are scheduled to descend upon the Met. As AP's own Beatrice Dupuy waited patiently on a gray Manhattan afternoon, she noted that fans had already started packing the streets around the Upper East Side museum. But even at 3 p.m. Eastern, the police presence was minimal as workers clad in yellow vests cleaned the sidewalks.

The press line was full of reporters trying their best to emulate Chanel, with many a dark suit or tux on men and women alike. A star himself joined their ranks: In a pink ensemble accessorized with giant rosettes, Harvey Guillén (Guillermo of "What We Do in the Shadows" fame) queued up to get set for a hosting stint with E! News.

HAVE YOU MET THE DEBT GALA?

Monday's gala is a benefit for the museum's Costume Institute and a pricey affair — last year, the exclusive event brought in more than \$17 million. For those with no invite or who aren't inclined to spend tens of thousands, alternative events have popped up in recent years.

On the torrentially rainy Sunday before, the Brooklyn borough played host to two such events: The People's Ball, at the Brooklyn Public Library, and the Debt Gala, at The Bell House. The former is a free event that allows guests to sashay down the runway in the Central Library's lobby. The library's website doesn't specifically reference the Met Gala — rather, pitting itself "in contrast to the elite galas that pop up across the city in the spring" — but the Debt Gala very much does.

Around 300 people attended the inaugural Debt Gala, raising more than \$15,000 for RIP Medical Debt, organizers told the AP. This year's funds will go toward buying and wiping out others' medical debt, but organizers say the gala might target different types of debt in future years.

Inspired by the 2016 Met Gala theme, "Manus x Machina," the Debt Gala chose "Garbage X Glamour" for a sustainability focus. "The drama of the weather matched the drama of the looks," organizers said — among them: a pink shawl and personal runway made of bubble wrap; a harness made of tampons and condoms created by performer Joyelle Nicole Johnson; a green corset made of CDs; and, of course, a dress made of trash bags.

The guests had to evacuate the venue because of flooding, but sustained the night at a nearby bar.

PAS DE CHAT: NO CHOUPETTE

The Met Gala guest list is highly secretive and thus in great demand. But this year, there was one name that had fashion fans and the press chatter: Choupette Lagerfeld, 11.

Would Lagerfeld's muse — who also happened to be the late designer's cat — leave her perch in France for New York? Alas, she has spoken: Non.

Choupette — or an oracle with opposable thumbs — took to Instagram on Monday morning to dispel rumors that she would walk (or be walked) up the iconic stairs. While she expressed gratitude that the man she calls "Daddy" was being honored, she said "we preferred to stay peacefully & cozy at home."

Her account posted the photo Monday morning. If she's changed her mind in the hours since, she could still make the gala — after all, the flight from Paris to New York is around eight hours and the U.S. Cus-

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toms and Border Protection does not require domestic cats to quarantine upon arrival. Oui, we checked.

INSIDE THE MET EXHIBIT

AP's Jocelyn Noveck got a sneak peek inside the Met's actual exhibit on Lagerfeld. With a bit of cheek, a doorway is emblazoned with the words: "Fashion does not belong in a museum." And yet visitors are treated to 14 galleries of fashion in the museum. While that quote came from Lagerfeld himself, Noveck notes that the exhibit otherwise doesn't focus on Lagerfeld's more contentious takes.

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH KARL LAGERFELD

The late fashion designer's selection as the theme is not without controversy, with some criticizing his unapologetically polemical comments on a variety of topics, including xenophobic and fatphobic remarks. AP Entertainment Writer Leanne Italie, who will be anchoring our coverage tonight, breaks down the designer's multifaceted legacy.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS YEAR'S MET GALA

This year is themed around the Metropolitan Museum of Art's new exhibit, "Karl Lagerfeld: A Line of Beauty." Given that Lagerfeld was, well, a fashion designer, you can expect many a haute look.

The guest list is heavily guarded, but every year leaks do escape. Check out our guide on the 2023 Met Gala for a sneak peek on who might walk up those iconic stairs tonight, brought to you by AP National Writer Jocelyn Noveck (who will also bring you one of the rare dispatches from inside the event).

HOW TO WATCH THE MET GALA

A livestream will kick off on Vogue.com at 6:30 p.m. Eastern. But the AP can give you a first look at what to expect — check back here in the late afternoon for a livestream of departures from the Mark Hotel, a nearby venue where many stars get ready for the gala.

For more Met Gala coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/met-gala>

Muslim mayor blocked from White House Eid celebration

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. Secret Service said Monday it blocked a Muslim mayor from Prospect Park, New Jersey, from attending a White House celebration with President Joe Biden to belatedly mark the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Shortly before he was set to arrive at the White House for the Eid-al-Fitr celebration, Mayor Mohamed Khairullah said he received a call from the White House stating that he had not been cleared for entry by the Secret Service and could not attend the celebration where Biden delivered remarks to hundreds of guests. He said the White House official did not explain why the Secret Service had blocked his entry.

Khairullah, 47, informed the New Jersey chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations after he was told he would not be allowed to attend the event.

The group has called on the Biden administration to cease the FBI's dissemination of information from what is known as a Terrorist Screening Data Set that includes hundreds of thousands of individuals. The group informed Khairullah that a person with his name and birthdate was in a dataset that CAIR attorneys obtained in 2019.

Khairullah was an outspoken critic of President Donald Trump's travel ban that limited entry to the U.S. of citizens from several predominantly Muslim countries. He also has travelled to Bangladesh and Syria to do humanitarian work with the Syrian American Medical Society and the Watan Foundation.

"It left me baffled, shocked and disappointed," Khairullah said in a telephone interview as he made his way home to New Jersey on Monday evening. "It's not a matter of I didn't get to go to a party. It's why I did not go. And it's a list that has targeted me because of my identity. And I don't think the highest office

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in the United States should be down with such profiling.”

U.S. Secret Service spokesman Anthony Guglielmi confirmed that Khairullah was not allowed into the White House complex, but declined to detail why. Khairullah was elected to a fifth term as the borough's mayor in January.

“While we regret any inconvenience this may have caused, the mayor was not allowed to enter the White House complex this evening,” Guglielmi said in a statement. “Unfortunately we are not able to comment further on the specific protective means and methods used to conduct our security operations at the White House.”

The White House declined to comment.

Selaedin Maksut, executive director of the New Jersey chapter of CAIR, called the move “wholly unacceptable and insulting.”

“If these such incidents are happening to high-profile and well-respected American-Muslim figures like Mayor Khairullah, this then begs the question: what is happening to Muslims who do not have the access and visibility that the mayor has?” Maksut said.

Khairullah said he was stopped by authorities in 2019 and interrogated at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York for three hours and questioned about whether he knew any terrorists. The incident happened when he was returning to the United States after a family visit to Turkey where his wife has family.

On another occasion, he said he was briefly held at the U.S.-Canada border as he traveled back into the country with family.

The group said Khairullah helped the New Jersey Democratic Party compile names of local Muslim leadership to invite to the White House Eid celebration and over the weekend was a guest at an event at the New Jersey governor's mansion.

Khairullah was born in Syria, but his family was displaced in the midst of the government crackdowns by Hafez al-Assad's government in the early 1980s. His family fled to Saudi Arabia before moving to Prospect Park in 1991. He has lived there since.

He became a U.S. citizen in 2000 and was elected to his first term as the town's mayor in 2001. He also spent 14 years as a volunteer firefighter in his community.

Khairullah said he made seven trips to Syria with humanitarian aid organizations between 2012 and 2015 as a civil war ravaged much of the country.

“I am Syrian and you know it was very difficult to see what we saw on TV and and social media, and not respond to help people,” he said. “I mean we felt very helpless.”

Oklahoma governor signs gender-affirming care ban for kids

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Oklahoma on Monday became the latest state to ban gender-affirming medical care for minors as Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt signed a bill that makes it a felony for health care workers to provide children with treatments that can include puberty-blocking drugs and hormones.

Oklahoma joins at least 15 other states with laws banning such care, as conservatives across the country have targeted transgender rights.

Stitt, who was reelected in November, made the ban a priority of this year's legislative session, saying he wanted to protect children. Transgender advocates and parents of transgender children say such care is essential.

Stitt signed bills last year that prohibit transgender girls and women from playing on female sports teams and prevent transgender children from using school bathrooms that correspond to their gender identity.

“Last year, I called for a statewide ban on all irreversible gender transition surgeries and hormone therapies on minors so I am thrilled to sign this into law today and protect our kids,” Stitt said in a statement released after the signing. “We cannot turn a blind eye to what's happening across our nation, and as governor I am proud to stand up for what's right and ban life-altering transition surgeries on children in

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the state of Oklahoma.”

The bill Stitt signed on Monday makes it illegal to provide gender-transition medical care for anyone under the age of 18. Such treatment can include surgery as well as hormones and drugs that suppress or delay normal puberty.

Transgender advocates and parents of transgender children say such care is essential.

Several civil liberty organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma, has promised to “take any necessary legal action” to prevent the law from taking effect.

“Gender-affirming care is a critical part of helping transgender adolescents succeed, establish healthy relationships with their friends and family, live authentically as themselves, and dream about their futures,” Lambda Legal, the ACLU and the ACLU said in a joint statement.

At least 16 states have now enacted laws restricting or banning gender-affirming care for minors: Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah, South Dakota and West Virginia. Federal judges have blocked enforcement of laws in Alabama and Arkansas, and nearly two dozen states are considering bills this year to restrict or ban care.

Three states — Florida, Missouri and Texas — have banned or restricted the care via regulations or administrative orders and Missouri’s is the only one that also limits the treatments for adults. A judge has blocked Missouri’s restrictions. Texas’ governor has ordered child welfare officials to investigate reports of children receiving such care as child abuse, though a judge has blocked those investigations.

Few leads, false alarms as search for Texas gunman drags on

By JUAN A. LOZANO and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

CLEVELAND, Texas (AP) — The search for a gunman in Texas who killed five neighbors from Honduras dragged into a third day Monday with false alarms and few apparent leads, while Republican Gov. Greg Abbott faced backlash over drawing attention to the victims’ immigration status.

An FBI agent on the scene near Houston acknowledged they have little to go on in the widening manhunt for 38-year-old Francisco Oropeza, who has been deported four times since 2009, but who neighbors say lived on their street for years prior to Friday night’s shooting in the rural town of Cleveland.

Twice on Monday, a sheriff’s office in a neighboring county alerted the public about possible sightings, but neither turned up Oropeza.

Abbott offered a \$50,000 reward over the weekend for any tips that might lead to the gunman, and while doing so, the three-term governor described all the victims as “illegal immigrants” — a potentially false statement that his office walked back and apologized for Monday. Critics accused Abbott, who has made hard-line immigration measures a signature issue in Texas, of putting politics into the shooting.

“We’ve since learned that at least one of the victims may have been in the United States legally,” Abbott spokesperson Renae Eze said in a statement. “We regret if the information was incorrect and detracted from the important goal of finding and arresting the criminal.”

Eze said information provided by federal officials after the shooting had indicated that the suspect and victims were in the country illegally. Her statement did not address why Abbott mentioned their status and she did not immediately respond to questions about the criticism.

More than 250 law enforcement officers from multiple agencies, including the U.S. Marshals, are now part of a growing search that has come up empty despite additional manpower, scent-tracking dogs, drones and a total of \$80,000 in reward money on the table. On Monday, a heavy presence of police converged in Montgomery County after a possible sighting, but the sheriff’s office later said none of the persons were found to be Oropeza.

A few hours later, the department reported another possible sighting, tweeting that several schools had “secured their campuses” and again asked residents to avoid the area. But that search, too, turned up nothing.

Both were among the first times since the shooting that authorities had announced a possible sighting.

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"I can tell you right now, we have zero leads," James Smith, the FBI special agent in charge, said Sunday. The FBI in Houston said in a tweet on Sunday that it was referring to the suspect as Oropesa, not Oropeza, to "better reflect his identity in law enforcement systems." His family lists their name as Oropeza on a sign outside their yard, as well as in public records.

Oropeza is considered armed and dangerous after fleeing the area Friday night, likely on foot. San Jacinto County Sheriff Greg Capers said authorities had widened the search area beyond the scene of the shooting, which occurred after the suspect's neighbors asked him to stop firing off rounds in his yard late at night because a baby was trying to sleep.

At a Sunday vigil in Cleveland, Wilson Garcia, the father of the 1-month-old, described the terrifying efforts inside his home by friends and family that night to escape, hide and shield themselves and children after Oropeza walked up to the home and began firing, killing his wife first at the front door.

Police recovered the AR-15-style rifle that they said Oropeza used in the shootings. Authorities were not sure if Oropeza was carrying another weapon after others were found in his home.

The alleged shooter is a Mexican national who has been deported four times, according to a U.S. official with direct knowledge of the case who spoke on condition of anonymity because public disclosure was not authorized.

The official said the gunman was first deported in March 2009 and last in July 2016. He was also deported in September 2009 and January 2012.

Law enforcement on the scene have not confirmed the citizenship status of the victims. By describing them as "illegal immigrants" on Sunday in his first public statement about the shooting — and perhaps incorrectly — Abbott came under criticism from immigrant rights groups and Democrats.

"It is indefensible to any right-hearted Texan to use divisive language to smear innocent victims," said Domingo Garcia, president of the League of United Latin American Citizens.

The victims were identified as Diana Velazquez Alvarado, 21; Julisa Molina Rivera, 31; Jose Jonathan Casarez, 18; Sonia Argentina Guzman, 25; and Daniel Enrique Laso, 9.

Capers said he hoped the reward money would motivate people to provide information and that there were plans to put up billboards in Spanish to spread the word.

Veronica Pineda, who lives across the street from the suspect's home, said authorities had stopped by her house over the weekend to ask if they could search her property to see if the gunman might be hiding there. She said she was fearful that the gunman had not yet been captured.

Associated Press reporter Elliot Spagat in San Diego and Jake Bleiberg in Dallas contributed to this report.

US readies second attempt at speedy border asylum screenings

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — President Joe Biden scrapped expedited asylum screenings during his first month in office as part of a gutting of Trump administration border policies that included building a wall with Mexico. Now he is preparing his own version.

Donald Trump's fast-track reviews drew sharp criticism from internal government watchdog agencies as the percentage of people who passed those "credible fear interviews" plummeted. But the Biden administration has insisted its speedy screening for asylum-seekers is different: Interviews will be done exclusively by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, not by Border Patrol agents, and everyone will have access to legal counsel.

The decision to use fast-track screenings comes as COVID-19 asylum restrictions are set to expire on May 11 and the U.S. government prepares for an expected increase in illegal crossings from Mexico. The Texas border cities of El Paso, Laredo and Brownsville have declared local states of emergency in recent days to prepare for the anticipated influx.

Normally, about three in four migrants pass credible fear interviews, though far fewer eventually win asylum. But during the five months of the Trump-era program, only 23% passed the initial screening, while

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69% failed and 9% withdrew, according to the Government Accountability Office.

Those who get past initial screenings are generally freed in the United States to pursue their cases in immigration court, which typically takes four years. Critics say the court backlog encourages more people to seek asylum.

To pass screenings, migrants must convince an asylum officer they have a "significant possibility" of prevailing before a judge on arguments that they face persecution in their home countries on grounds of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a social group.

Under the Biden administration's fast-track program, those who don't qualify will be deported "in a matter of days or just a few weeks," Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said Thursday.

The expedited screenings will be applied only to single adults, Mayorkas said.

Despite the administration's assurances that people will have access to legal services, some immigrant advocates who were briefed by the administration are doubtful. Katherine Hawkins, senior legal analyst at the Project on Government Oversight, noted that advocates were told attorneys would not be allowed inside holding facilities.

The Trump administration used fast-track reviews from October 2019 until March 2020, when it began using a 1944 public health law known as Title 42 to expel immigrants on the grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19. The speedy screenings were among Trump-era immigration policies that Biden rolled back in a February 2021 executive order.

Unlike the Trump administration, the Biden administration won't limit migrants to just one phone call. But it's unclear how many calls U.S. authorities can facilitate, especially if there is no answer and attorneys call back, Hawkins said.

Screenings initially will be limited to Spanish-speaking countries to which the U.S. has regular deportation flights, according to Hawkins and others briefed. The administration began limited screening this month in Donna, Texas, in the Rio Grande Valley, and later expanded to large tents in other border cities, including San Diego; Yuma, Arizona; and El Paso, Texas. Migrants will get a video presentation to explain the interview process.

Mayorkas, a former federal prosecutor, didn't speak in detail about access to legal counsel in remarks Thursday about a broad strategy that, in addition to the screenings, includes processing centers in Guatemala, Colombia and potentially elsewhere for people to come legally to the U.S. through an airport.

"We have expanded our holding capacity and set up equipment and procedures so that individuals have the ability to access counsel," Mayorkas said.

The Homeland Security Department's inspector general took issue with lack of legal representation under Trump's expedited screening. There were four cordless phones for migrants to share when screenings began in El Paso. Guards took them to a shack to consult attorneys.

Phone booths were later installed but didn't have handsets for safety reasons, forcing migrants to speak loudly and within earshot of people outside, the inspector general said.

Facilities built under Biden are more spacious with plenty of phone booths, according to people who have visited.

"There are rows of cubicles, enclosed," said Paulina Reyes, an attorney at advocacy group ImmDef who visited a San Diego holding facility in March.

The administration has not said how many attorneys have volunteered to represent asylum-seekers. Hawkins said officials told advocates they are reaching out to firms that offer low- or no-cost services to people in immigration detention centers.

Erika Pinheiro, executive director of advocacy group Al Otro Lado, which is active in Southern California and Tijuana, Mexico, said she has not been approached but would decline to represent asylum-seekers in expedited screenings. They arrive exhausted and unfamiliar with asylum law, hindering their abilities to effectively tell their stories.

"We know what the conditions are like. We know people are not going to be mentally prepared," she said.

The Biden administration aims to complete screenings within 72 hours, the maximum time Border Patrol

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is supposed to hold migrants under an agency policy that's routinely ignored.

It's a tall order. It currently takes about four weeks to complete a screening. Under Trump's expedited screenings, about 20% of immigrants were in custody for a week or less, according to the GAO. About 86% were held 20 days or less.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has identified 480 former asylum officers or those with training to assist about 800 on the expedited screenings, said Michael Knowles, a spokesman for the American Federation of Government Employees Council 119, which represents asylum officers. Despite the staffing surge, Knowles said officers worry about the pace of the work, "like an assembly line, 'hurry up, hurry up,' when you have lives at stake."

"All hands will be on this deck for the foreseeable future," Knowles said. "We don't know how long."

Associated Press writer Valerie Gonzalez in Brownsville, Texas, contributed.

Why First Republic failed. Are other banks to follow?

By The Associated Press undefined

First Republic Bank has become the second large regional bank with assets over \$200 billion to fail in just a few weeks. Like Silicon Valley Bank, which was seized by the government on March 10, First Republic catered to a wealthy clientele, which helped it grow deposits rapidly but may have also contributed to its undoing. The bank's business model left it susceptible to a sudden rise in interest rates.

Since the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank — and Signature Bank the same weekend — investors have wondered who's next. First Republic quickly rose to the top of that list, but investors and analysts worried about banks such as Comerica and KeyCorp, which also had large numbers of accounts with deposits above the federally-insured level of \$250,000.

Here are some things to know about the collapse of First Republic Bank.

WHY DID FIRST REPUBLIC FAIL?

First Republic grew rapidly through deposits from wealthy individuals and companies. It used those deposits to make large loans, including jumbo mortgages, when interest rates were at historically low levels in hopes of then convincing customers to expand into more profitable products like wealth management.

Many of the bank's accounts had deposits well north of the federally-insured \$250,000. Once Silicon Valley Bank went under, clients pulled their money, fearful their deposits were in danger. First Republic said last week that depositors had withdrawn more than \$100 billion, most of it during a few days in mid-March.

"Too many (First Republic) customers showed their true loyalties were to their own fears," wrote Timothy Coffey, an analyst with Janney Montgomery Scott, in a note to investors.

What's more, the large loans on First Republic's books dropped in value as the Federal Reserve rapidly raised interest rates last year. So, if the bank tried to sell the loans to raise capital, it would do so at a loss. Similar circumstances had doomed Silicon Valley Bank.

First Republic planned to sell off unprofitable assets, including low interest mortgages that it provided to wealthy clients. It also announced plans to lay off up to a quarter of its workforce, which totaled about 7,200 employees in late 2022. But those plans were seen as too little, too late, by analysts.

By the middle of last week, it became clear government intervention in First Republic was necessary. Treasury officials asked banks to submit bids for First Republic, and bankers and regulators worked through the weekend to find a way forward.

WHAT BANK OR BANKS ARE NEXT?

For now, analysts expect the banking system will be spared any more large bank failures, saying the problems at Silicon Valley, Signature Bank and First Republic were unique to those companies.

Other midsize banks suffered large withdrawals of deposits and were forced to borrow from federal programs to shore up their balance sheets, but none were hit as hard as First Republic.

For example, Comerica, based in Dallas, said deposits fell by \$3.7 billion after March 9 and the company borrowed \$13 billion from federal programs "to provide a buffer in excess of normal operating levels." Still

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the company earned \$324 million in the first quarter, down slightly from the fourth quarter, but up from \$189 million in the year-ago quarter.

Comerica shares dropped 37% in the week after Silicon Valley Bank failed, but have remained steady since. On Monday, the shares slipped almost 2%.

Shares of most midsize banks fell Monday, but the drops were moderate compared to the steep double-digits losses for many of them on March 13.

The trading "suggests little or no spillovers — consistent with the notion that there is no surprise" with the seizure of First Republic, said Krishna Guha at Evercore ISI.

WHAT HAPPENS TO FIRST REPUBLIC STOCKHOLDERS?

First Republic's stock traded at \$115 on March 8, then plummeted in the following days and weeks and closed Friday at \$3.15. About \$20 billion in market value has been wiped out. Trading in the stock was halted before U.S. markets opened Monday.

JPMorgan Chase, which has agreed to buy the deposits and most of the assets of First Republic, stressed that it is not assuming any of First Republic's corporate debt or preferred stocks.

After a bank's failure, bondholders are among the last to get paid — stockholders are at the very end of the line. The FDIC does not give estimates on how likely any creditor is to get repaid.

But the agency did say that its deposit insurance fund, which banks pay into, could take a \$13 billion estimated loss as a result of First Republic's failure.

While conditions could change over time, that likely leaves nothing left over for investors to recoup. Stockholders at Silicon Valley Bank and Signature were wiped out.

The outcome was just fine with one interested observer.

"While depositors are being protected, shareholders are losing their investments," said President Joe Biden during a Rose Garden event focused on small businesses, when asked about the bank seizure. "Critically, taxpayers are not the ones who are on the hook."

At least 6 dead after dust storm causes crashes in Illinois

By JOHN O'CONNOR Associated Press

DIVERNON, Ill. (AP) — A windstorm in central Illinois kicked up dangerous clouds of blinding dust off farm fields Monday, causing numerous crashes that killed at least six people on Interstate 55, police said.

The late morning crashes involved 40 to 60 cars and multiple tractor-trailers, two of which caught fire, Illinois State Police Maj. Ryan Starrick said.

He said at least six people died, all in the northbound lanes, and more than 30 people on both sides of I-55 were transported to hospitals with injuries.

"The only thing you could hear after we got hit was crash after crash after crash behind us," said Tom Thomas, 43, who was traveling south to St. Louis.

I-55 was shut down in both directions in Montgomery County, 75 miles (120 kilometers) north of St. Louis, and likely won't reopen until Tuesday.

Starrick told reporters that it was a spring version of a "whiteout situation" typically seen in winter snowstorms. Gov. J.B. Pritzker described the scene as "horrific."

"The cause of the crashes is due to excessive winds blowing dirt from farm fields across the highway, leading to zero visibility," Starrick said.

Dairon Socarras Quintero, 32, who was driving to St. Louis to make deliveries for his custom frame company based in Elk Grove Village, said that after his truck hit the vehicle in front of him, he exited and moved to the side of the road to ensure his safety, then returned after the chain reaction of crashes ended behind him.

Socarras Quintero said the dust continued to blow ferociously as he checked on other motorists and emergency personnel arrived. He held up his backpack, which was caked with dust even though it was inside a closed truck cab.

Winds at the time were gusting between 35 mph (56 kph) and 45 mph (74 kph), the National Weather

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Service said.

"It's very flat, very few trees," meteorologist Chuck Schaffer said. "It's been very dry across this area really for the last three weeks. The farmers are out there tilling their fields and planting. The top layer of soil is quite loose."

Evan Anderson, 25, who was returning home to St. Louis from Chicago, said a semi turned before striking his vehicle, sparing him from even more damage.

"You couldn't even see," Anderson said. "People tried to slow down and other people didn't, and I just got plowed into. There were just so many cars and semitrucks with so much momentum behind them."

Kevin Schott, director of emergency services in Montgomery County, said it was a "very difficult scene" and one that's "very hard to train for."

"We had to search every vehicle, whether they were involved in the accident or just pulled over, to check for injuries," he said, adding that people were "upset — visibly so, understandably so."

Authorities set up staging areas away from the crash site to help travelers reunite with friends and family.

Associated Press reporters Rick Callahan in Indianapolis and Ed White in Detroit contributed to this report.

DeSantis board sues Disney in latest tug-of-war in Florida

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Days after Disney sued Florida's governor in federal court for what it described as retaliation for opposing the state's so-called "Don't Say Gay" bill, Disney World's governing board — made up of Gov. Ron DeSantis appointees — filed a lawsuit Monday against the entertainment giant.

The Central Florida Tourism Oversight District sued Disney in state court in Orlando, and board members voted to defend itself in federal court in Tallahassee where the entertainment company filed its lawsuit last Wednesday.

The Disney lawsuit against the governor, the board and its five members asks a judge to void the governor's takeover of the theme park resort district previously controlled by Disney for 55 years. The governing board's lawsuit seeks to maintain its oversight of design and construction in the district that governs Disney World's 25,000 acres after the previous Disney-controlled board signed over those powers to the company before the DeSantis-appointed board members held their first meeting earlier this year.

The DeSantis board's lawsuit was filed Monday afternoon in Orange County and claims the agreements with Disney "reek of a backroom deal." The previous board members failed to give proper notice about the agreements, lacked the authority to make them, unlawfully delegated governmental authority to a private entity and the agreements are unenforceable under Florida law, according to the suit.

"We will seek justice in our own backyard," Martin Garcia, chair of the Central Florida Tourism Oversight District, said at Monday morning's special meeting approving the lawsuit.

An email seeking comment was sent Monday morning to Disney officials.

Disney filed its lawsuit last week after the oversight board appointed by DeSantis voted to void a deal that gave the company authority over design and construction decisions in its sprawling properties near Orlando.

Disney's lawsuit was the latest tug-of-war in a more than year-old feud between Disney and DeSantis that has engulfed the governor in criticism as he prepares to launch an expected presidential bid in the coming months.

DeSantis, who has framed himself as a Republican firebrand able to deftly implement his conservative agenda without drama, has dived headlong into the fray with the beloved company and major tourism driver, as business leaders and White House rivals bash his stance as a rejection of the small-government tenets of conservatism.

The fight began last year after Disney, in the face of significant pressure, publicly opposed a state law that bans classroom lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity in early grades, a policy critics call "Don't Say Gay."

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As punishment, DeSantis took over Disney World's self-governing district through legislation passed by Florida lawmakers and appointed a new board of supervisors that would oversee municipal services for the sprawling theme parks and hotels. But before the new board came in, the company pushed through 11th-hour agreements that stripped the new supervisors of much of their authority.

In response, DeSantis and Florida lawmakers vowed to pass legislation that would repeal the agreements and end an exemption for Disney parks when it comes to ride inspections by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The agriculture agency is responsible for inspecting amusement rides in Florida, but an exception was carved out for the state's largest theme park operators, such as Disney and Universal Destinations & Experiences, which do their own safety inspections. Under the proposal, the exemption would end for rides in special governmental districts, which basically targets just Disney World.

"No corporation is above the law and the people of this state," DeSantis said Monday at a news conference in Titusville, along Florida's Space Coast.

The creation of the self-governing district by the Florida Legislature was instrumental in Disney's decision in the 1960s to build near Orlando. The company had told the state at the time that it planned to build a futuristic city that would include a transit system and urban planning innovations, so the company needed autonomy in building and deciding how to use the land. The futuristic city never materialized and instead morphed into a second theme park that opened in 1982.

Before and after the vote authorizing the lawsuit against Disney in state court on Monday, the current board members defended their work, claiming they were trying to promote better governance and bring the district into the 21st century.

Board member Ron Peri described being mocked in the media and getting hate mail. During the public comment portion of Monday's meeting, a man who has a Disney timeshare told the board members, "You guys are terrible, and I think you all should resign."

Peri, who used to run a Florida-based ministry and has been accused of making anti-LGBTQ statements, urged the public to give the new board a chance.

"Disney suing me? You've got to be kidding," Peri said. "I have loved Disney World. My kids have enjoyed it. The Magic Kingdom is wonderful. It is my hope the actions we take will be better for everyone, Disney included."

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at @MikeSchneiderAP.

Montana Rep. Zoey Zephyr sues over removal from House floor

By AMY BETH HANSON and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Montana state Rep. Zoey Zephyr asked a court Monday to allow for her return to the House floor after she was silenced and barred for chiding her Republican colleagues over legislation to restrict gender-affirming health care and for encouraging protesters.

Attorneys for the first-term lawmaker sued in state district court in Helena on behalf of Zephyr, a transgender Democrat who represents a liberal district in the college town of Missoula, and several constituents who the attorneys said were being denied their right to adequate representation.

Zephyr, whose comments in the Montana Legislature have made her a prominent figure in transgender rights and in conversations about the muffling of dissent in statehouses, said in a statement Monday that she and her constituents were targeted "because I dared to give voice to the values and needs of transgender people like myself."

The legal challenge against House Speaker Matt Regier and Sergeant-at-Arms Brad Murfitt comes with just days left in the Legislature's biennial session.

A spokesperson for Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen — a Republican whose office will defend the case — said the lawsuit was frivolous.

"This is performance litigation — political activism masquerading as a lawsuit," said Emily Flower, Knudsen's press secretary. She added that a court decision blocking the Legislature's censure of Zephyr would

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violate the separation of powers between branches of government.

Murfitt said he would not comment on the lawsuit, and Regier did not return telephone messages and an email seeking comment.

Residents of the Missoula area said in declarations filed as part of the lawsuit that they wanted Zephyr heard in the Legislature.

Anna Wong, who lives in Missoula County with her transgender child, supported Zephyr in the 2022 election with the expectation the lawmaker would "speak out against the onslaught of bills targeting transgender youth."

"Suicide amongst transgender youth is not imaginary," Wong said. "It is not a game and it is not a political foil. It is real. It is heartbreaking. And it is the responsibility of my representative to speak out against bills promoting it."

Zephyr's attorneys hoped to get a ruling as quickly as possible on their request for a temporary restraining order against Regier and Murfitt. One of the most important pieces of the Legislature's work, finalizing a budget for the next two years, is unfinished.

"Every minute matters," said Alex Rate, legal director of the Montana ACLU and one of Zephyr's attorneys. "Without Zephyr having her full rights and privileges restored, her 11,000 constituents are voiceless."

Democratic Minority Leader Kim Abbott appeared to concede that the removal of Zephyr was within the House's authority when she spoke on the House floor as the matter was considered last week. "You absolutely can do this, by rule, by the Constitution ... But just because you can do it does not make it the right choice," she said.

Abbott did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Republicans achieved a supermajority in Montana during the 2022 election and now control two-thirds of the state House and Senate, in addition to the governor's office.

GOP leaders, under pressure from hard-line conservatives, silenced Zephyr from participating in floor debates and demanded she apologize two weeks ago, after she said those who supported a ban on gender-affirming care for youths would have blood on their hands. Days later, she raised her microphone in defiance as demonstrators in the House gallery angrily demanded she be allowed to speak, leading to seven arrests and Zephyr's banishment from the House floor.

Republicans moved to sideline Zephyr further by canceling some meetings of the two committees on which she serves and moving the bills they were to hear to other committees, Democrats said.

She spent the first day of her exile last week battling to use a bench in a statehouse hallway. Her key card to access Capitol entrances, bathrooms and party workspaces was deactivated, according to the lawsuit.

Zephyr spoke briefly during a House Judiciary Committee meeting Monday morning. The full House — minus Zephyr — met in the afternoon, with Zephyr casting votes from a statehouse snack bar because several people occupied the bench.

The House adjourned in the evening without a ruling being made in the lawsuit. Lawmakers were scheduled to reconvene Tuesday.

Her situation echoed the ouster this year of two Tennessee lawmakers from that state's legislature for a protest over gun policy.

In retaliating against Zephyr, Montana Republicans accused her of crossing a line that is faint at best in political debate. It's not uncommon for legislators wading into heated issues like abortion or gun rights to be scolded about "blood on your hands" by protesters or even fellow representatives.

Attorneys for Zephyr noted previous legal disputes in which courts sided with politicians who made controversial comments, including a case that involved a conservative Oregon lawmaker's veiled threats against the state police.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals last year ruled that a requirement for Oregon Sen. Brian Boquist to give 12 hours' notice before coming to the state Capitol violated his freedom of speech as an elected official and came as retaliation for his words.

The attorneys also cited a 1966 U.S. Supreme Court case in which justices sided against Georgia lawmakers who tried to exclude a newly elected lawmaker — Julian Bond, who later became chair of the

NAACP — because he endorsed criticism of the Vietnam War.

Brown reported from Billings, Montana.

Man who lost wife, son in Texas mass shooting tells story

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

CLEVELAND, Texas (AP) — Wilson Garcia hadn't even asked his neighbor to stop shooting his gun.

People in their rural town north of Houston are used to people firing their weapons to blow off steam, but it was late Friday night, and Garcia had a month-old son who was crying.

So, Garcia said, he and two other people went to his neighbor's house to "respectfully" ask that he shoot farther away from their home.

"He told us he was on his property, and he could do what he wanted," Garcia said Sunday after a vigil in Cleveland, Texas, for his 9-year-old son who was killed in the attack that soon followed.

The suspect, 38-year-old Francisco Oropeza, remained at large Monday despite a search involving more than 250 law enforcement officers from multiple jurisdictions.

Garcia called the police after Oropeza rejected his request. The man shot some more, and now it sounded louder. In the neighborhood of homes on 1-acre lots, Garcia could see the man on his front porch but couldn't tell what he was doing.

His family continued to call police -- five calls in all, Garcia said. Five times the dispatcher assured that help was coming.

And then, 10 to 20 minutes after Garcia had walked back from Oropeza's house, the man started running toward him, and reloading.

"I told my wife, 'Get inside. This man has loaded his weapon,'" Garcia said. "My wife told me to go inside because 'he won't fire at me, I'm a woman.'"

The gunman walked up to the home and began firing. Garcia's wife, Sonia Argentina Guzman, 25, was at the front door, and the first to die.

The house held 15 people in all, several of them friends who had been there to join Garcia's wife on a church retreat. The gunman seemed intent on killing everyone, Garcia said.

Also among the dead were Garcia's son, Daniel Enrique Laso, and two women who died while shielding Garcia's baby and 2-year-old daughter. Garcia said one of the women had told him to jump out a window "because my children were without a mother and one of their parents had to stay alive to take care of them."

"I am trying to be strong for my children," Garcia said, crying. "My daughter sort of understands. It is very difficult when she begins to ask for mama and for her (older) brother."

On Monday, students in Laso's third-grade class at Northside Elementary in Cleveland set up a small monument in his memory in their classroom. It included books and a soccer ball that all his classmates signed; soccer was Laso's favorite sport, said principal Pete Armstrong. A memorial including flowers and stuffed animals grew at the foot of a flagpole in front of the school. Extra counselors were at the campus.

"It's awful important that we let the students celebrate his life as they need to," said Armstrong, who called Laso a model student whose "smile was contagious."

"Times like these bring us closer together," Armstrong said. "We are moving forward with his memory."

Police recovered the AR-15-style rifle that they said Oropeza used in the shootings in the rural town north of Houston where the shooting took place just before midnight Friday. He likely fled the area on foot. Investigators found clothes and a phone while combing an area that includes dense layers of forest, but tracking dogs lost the scent, San Jacinto County Sheriff Greg Capers said.

Authorities were able to identify Oropeza by an identity card issued by Mexican authorities to citizens who reside outside the country, as well as doorbell camera footage. Capers said police have also interviewed the suspect's wife multiple times.

The FBI in Houston said in a tweet on Sunday that it was referring to the suspect as Oropesa, not Oropeza, to "better reflect his identity in law enforcement systems." His family lists their name as Oropeza

on a sign outside their yard, as well as in public records.

Garcia, his slain wife and son and the other three victims — Diana Velazquez Alvarado, 21; Julisa Molina Rivera, 31; and Jose Jonathan Casarez, 18 — were from Honduras.

“We’re looking for closure for this family,” Capers said.

Asked about response time, Capers said officers got there as fast as they could and that he had only three covering 700 square miles (1,800 square kilometers).

Veronica Pineda, 34, who lives across the street from the suspect’s home, said authorities asked if they could search her property to see if he might be hiding there. She said she was fearful that the gunman had not yet been captured.

“It is kind of scary,” she said. “You never know where he can be.”

Pineda said she didn’t know Oropeza well but occasionally saw him, his wife and son ride their horses on the street. She said the family had lived there about five or six years and that neighbors have called authorities in the past to complain about people firing guns.

Garcia also did not know Oropeza well, though their wives sometimes talked. Once, he said, the man helped him cut down a tree.

Associated Press Writer Susan Haigh in Norwich, Connecticut, contributed to this report.

Gwyneth Paltrow won’t recoup attorney fees in ski crash suit

By SAM METZ Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Gwyneth Paltrow will not recoup the attorneys’ fees she paid to successfully defend herself against a lawsuit from a 76-year-old retired optometrist who claimed she was at fault for crashing into him at a posh Utah ski resort in 2016.

In a ruling published on Saturday, a Utah judge said attorneys for Paltrow and Terry Sanderson had agreed to drop the matter of Paltrow’s attorneys’ fees. District Court Judge Kent Holmberg’s final judgment did not detail why the matter of attorneys’ fees that Paltrow sought in her 2019 countersuit was dropped.

The judgment affirmed the jury’s unanimous verdict finding Terry Sanderson — the man who collided with Paltrow — to be “100% at fault,” awarding Paltrow the \$1 she sought in a countersuit. It also said Sanderson would not appeal the verdict, effectively ending a protracted legal battle seven years after the two crashed on a beginner run near the base of Deer Valley Resort in Utah.

Representatives for Paltrow were not immediately available to answer questions about the final judgment or the money at stake. Neither side has publicly disclosed how much it cost to sustain a yearslong legal battle with a team of attorneys, expert witnesses from around the United States and, for Paltrow’s side, high-resolution animated recreations of her recollections of the crash.

The “Shakespeare in Love” and “Ironman” star’s eight-day court battle last month emerged as the most closely watched American celebrity trial since actors Johnny Depp and Amber Heard faced off last year. Sanderson’s lawsuit accused Paltrow of negligence and crashing into him from behind, and then leaving the scene of the accident without ensuring he was in good physical condition. He sought more than \$300,000 in damages — a threshold in Utah civil court that allows parties to introduce the most evidence and depose the longest list of witnesses.

Paltrow subsequently countersued for the symbolic \$1 and attorneys’ fees — claiming Sanderson had crashed into her from behind and was suing to exploit her fame and celebrity.

“I felt that acquiescing to a false claim compromised my integrity,” the founder and CEO of the beauty and wellness brand Goop said.

Under the glare of live Court TV cameras and extensive scrutiny from fans and detractors, Paltrow sat intently in the Park City courtroom throughout the proceedings last month, at and testified that at first, when the crash happened, she thought she was being “violated.”

After the verdict, Sanderson’s attorneys said they were weighing whether to appeal the case or to file for a new trial. Paltrow and her attorney said in separate statements that the countersuit more to do with

her principles than the dollar amount at stake. They were not immediately available to comment on the final judgment.

This story's headline has been corrected to show that Gwyneth Paltrow won't recoup attorneys' fees that she paid to defend herself in a recent lawsuit, not that she denied the attorneys' fees.

Treasury's Yellen says US could default as soon as June 1

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen notified Congress on Monday that the U.S. could default on its debt as early as June 1, if legislators do not raise or suspend the nation's borrowing authority before then and avert what could potentially become a global financial crisis.

In a letter to House and Senate leaders, Yellen urged congressional leaders "to protect the full faith and credit of the United States by acting as soon as possible" to address the \$31.4 trillion limit on its legal borrowing authority. She added that it is impossible to predict with certainty the exact date of when the U.S. will run out of cash.

"We have learned from past debt limit impasses that waiting until the last minute to suspend or increase the debt limit can cause serious harm to business and consumer confidence, raise short-term borrowing costs for taxpayers, and negatively impact the credit rating of the United States," Yellen said in the letter.

Also Monday, the Congressional Budget Office reported that it saw a greater risk of the U.S. running out of funds in early June. CBO Director Phillip L. Swagel said because of less-than-expected tax receipts this filing season and a faster IRS having processed already received returns, "Treasury's extraordinary measures will be exhausted sooner than we previously projected."

In January, Yellen sent a letter to congressional leaders, stating that her department had begun resorting to "extraordinary measures" to avoid a federal government default.

The Treasury said Monday it plans to increase its borrowing during the April to June quarter of this year, even as the federal government is close to breaching the debt limit.

The U.S. plans to borrow \$726 billion during the quarter. That's \$449 billion more than projected in January, due to a lower beginning-of-quarter cash balance and projections of lower-than-expected income tax receipts and higher spending.

While Russia's invasion of Ukraine remains a burden on U.S. economic growth, Treasury officials say the debate over the debt ceiling poses the greatest risk to the U.S. financial position.

Eric Van Nostrand, acting assistant secretary for economy policy, said in a statement that "even if Congress ultimately raises the debt limit before a default occurs, the ensuing uncertainty could raise borrowing costs and induce other financial stress that would weaken our labor market and our standing in the world."

"There is no time to waste," said Shai Akabas, director of economic policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center, which forecasts the so-called X-date when the government exhausts its extraordinary measures. His organization will also provide an updated X-date projection in the coming days, he says.

"The U.S. government is again within mere months or even weeks of failing to make good on all its obligations. That is not a position befitting of a country considered the bedrock of the financial system, and only adds uncertainty to an already shaky economy."

Democrats and the White House are pushing for Congress to increase the federal debt limit. President Joe Biden wants the cap raised without negotiation. The House Republican majority has most recently passed a bill to secure spending cuts in exchange for a debt limit increase. Biden on Monday invited the four Congressional leaders to the White House on May 9 to discuss the matter.

Yellen said last week at the Cap-to-Cap policy conference in Washington: "Congress must vote to raise or suspend the debt limit, and it should do so without conditions and it should not wait until the last minute. I believe that is a basic responsibility of our nation's leaders to get this done."

Feds: Hospitals that denied emergency abortion broke the law

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two hospitals that refused to provide an emergency abortion to a pregnant woman who was experiencing premature labor put her life in jeopardy and violated federal law, a first-of-its-kind investigation by the federal government has found.

The findings, revealed in documents obtained by The Associated Press, are a warning to hospitals around the country as they struggle to reconcile dozens of new state laws that ban or severely restrict abortion with a federal mandate for doctors to provide abortions when a woman's health is at risk. The competing edicts have been rolled out since the Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion last year.

But federal law, which requires doctors to treat patients in emergency situations, trumps those state laws, the nation's top health official said in a statement.

"Fortunately, this patient survived. But she never should have gone through the terrifying ordeal she experienced in the first place," Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra said. "We want her, and every patient out there like her, to know that we will do everything we can to protect their lives and health, and to investigate and enforce the law to the fullest extent of our legal authority, in accordance with orders from the courts."

The federal agency's investigation centers on two hospitals — Freeman Health System in Joplin, Missouri, and University of Kansas Health System in Kansas City, Kansas — that in August refused to provide an abortion to a Missouri woman whose water broke early at 17 weeks of pregnancy. Doctors at both hospitals told Mylissa Farmer that her fetus would not survive, that her amniotic fluid had emptied and that she was at risk for serious infection or losing her uterus, but they would not terminate the pregnancy because a fetal heartbeat was still detectable.

Ultimately, Farmer had to travel to an abortion clinic in Illinois.

"It was dehumanizing. It was terrifying. It was horrible not to get the care to save your life," Farmer, who lives in Joplin, said of her experience. "I felt like I was responsible to do something, to say something, to not have this happen again to another woman. It was bad enough to be so powerless."

The National Women's Law Center filed complaints with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services in Farmer's case, launching the first investigations that the federal agency has publicly acknowledged since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned last year. Across the country, women have reported being turned away from hospitals for abortions, despite doctors telling them that this puts them at further risk for infection or even death.

President Joe Biden's administration has prodded hospitals not to turn away patients in those situations, even when state law forbids abortions. Weeks after the Supreme Court's ruling, the Democratic administration reminded hospitals that federal law requires them to offer an abortion when a pregnant woman is at risk for an emergency medical condition. The federal government can investigate hospitals that receive Medicare and Medicaid money — which encompasses most facilities in the U.S. — for violations of the law.

Abortions are largely banned in Missouri, but there are exceptions for medical emergencies. In Kansas, when Farmer visited the hospital, abortions were still legal up to 22 weeks. It's unclear why the University of Kansas Health System refused to offer Farmer one.

Farmer's care at University of Kansas followed hospital policy, Jill Chadwick, the media relations director for the hospital system, said in a statement.

"It met the standard of care based upon the facts known at the time, and complied with all applicable law," Chadwick said in an email. "There is a process with CMS for this complaint and we respect that process. The University of Kansas Health System follows federal and Kansas law in providing appropriate, stabilizing, and quality care to all of its patients, including obstetric patients."

Freeman Health System did not respond to a request for comment.

CMS has not announced any fines or other penalties against the two hospitals in its investigation, but it did send them notices warning that they were in violation of the law and asking them to correct the

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problems that led to Farmer being turned away. Federal Medicare investigators will follow up with the hospitals before closing the case.

That likely won't be enough to convince hospitals and doctors that they should provide abortions in states where they're operating under the threat of prison time or large fines if they terminate a pregnancy, said Mary Ziegler, a law professor at the University of California, Davis.

"I don't know how much this approach really helps matters. The possibility of being criminalized for providing care is still there for a lot of these doctors," Ziegler said. "The incentive here would be to do nothing. The incentive here would be to turn the patient away."

Nationwide, doctors have reported uncertainty around how to provide care to pregnant women, especially in the nearly 20 states where new laws have banned or limited the care. Doctors face criminal and civil penalties in some states for aborting a pregnancy.

But in a letter sent Monday to hospital and doctors' associations that highlights the inquiries, Becerra said he hopes the investigations clarify that the organizations must follow the federal law, the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act, or EMTALA.

"While many state laws have recently changed," Becerra wrote, "it's important to know that the federal EMTALA requirements have not changed, and continue to require that health care professionals offer treatment, including abortion care, that the provider reasonably determines is necessary to stabilize the patient's emergency medical condition."

Follow the AP's coverage of abortion at <https://apnews.com/hub/abortion>.

Pot consulting paid Oregon secretary of state \$10K monthly

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Oregon Secretary of State Shemia Fagan apologized Monday for taking a job as a consultant for a marijuana company — part of an industry that her office just audited — that paid far more than her state salary.

After previously refusing to disclose the terms of her contract, Fagan had her office email reporters a copy on Monday. It showed the consultancy paid \$10,000 per month, with bonuses three times that amount if she helped the company get licensed in other states.

Fagan, a Democrat who is the state's second-highest ranking official, indicated she aims to hold onto her elected position despite Republican calls for her to resign. Gov. Tina Kotek, a Democrat, requested investigations by the Oregon Government Ethics Commission and the Oregon Department of Justice into the matter Friday.

"I am sorry for harming the trust that I and so many others have worked so hard to build with you over the last few years," Fagan said during a Zoom conference she held Monday. "I will begin working to build that trust back today."

The matter came to a head after Fagan's office released an audit Friday that called for the Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission to "reform" some rules for marijuana businesses, saying they are "burdens" when combined with federal restrictions on interstate commerce, banking and taxation.

Fagan recused herself from the audit of Oregon's marijuana regulatory agency because she is a paid consultant of an affiliate of marijuana retail chain La Mota, her spokesperson, Ben Morris, said at a virtual news conference timed with the audit's release.

Fagan noted Monday that ethics guidelines allow outside employment. She said the consultancy didn't represent a conflict of interest because any action taken as a result of the audit would be by the governor, Legislature or cannabis commission; and because a wide range of businesses would be affected by any regulation changes, not just her client.

La Mota's co-owner has hosted fundraisers for top Democratic Oregon politicians, including Fagan, while the co-owner, her partner and their business allegedly owed \$1.7 million in unpaid bills and more in state and federal taxes, according to Willamette Week, a Portland newspaper.

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Fagan told reporters Monday she contacted Connecticut Lt. Gov. Susan Bysiewicz as part of her consulting gig, "just to ask who would be somebody for a cannabis company to talk to if they wanted to get the lay of the land."

Bysiewicz spokesperson Samantha Taylor said in a statement that Fagan called about three weeks ago, asking about "Connecticut's cannabis license process for a client Fagan had as part of her consulting business."

After learning of Fagan's outside work, minority Republicans in the Legislature called for her resignation. "This appears to be an ethics violation and if it isn't then Oregon's ethics laws are broken," Senate Republican leader Tim Knopp and House Republican leader Vikki Breese-Iverson said in a joint statement Friday.

The governor underscored her own concerns as she called for the probes, saying: "It's critical that Oregonians trust their government."

Fagan announced Monday she was terminating her contract with Veriede Holdings, the La Mota affiliate. She also provided a copy of the contract, signed Feb. 24, which paid \$10,000 per month plus a bonus of \$30,000 if she helped the company acquire marijuana licenses in any state other than Oregon or New Mexico. A total of 21 states and Washington, D.C., have legalized recreational use of marijuana.

Fagan's annual salary as secretary of state, a job that is responsible for running elections in Oregon and overseeing state audits, is \$77,000. Fagan told reporters she is divorced with two young children and has student loans and other bills that she says her secretary of state's salary is not enough to cover.

She said her consultant job had nothing to do with her elected position. Reporters, though, were skeptical. They asked why she would be hired as a pot consultant unless La Mota wanted her to leverage her position to expand their business in other states, especially when there are numerous bona fide marijuana business experts in Oregon.

Fagan responded that she has experience advising and representing, as a lawyer, Oregon businesses and contended that her work for La Mota didn't require her to be a marijuana expert.

At Monday's news conference, Fagan fought back tears as she said she is "deeply honored to serve as Oregon Secretary of state, regardless of the compensation."

"I owe the people of Oregon an apology," Fagan said. "I exercised poor judgment by contracting with a company that is owned by my significant political donors and is regulated by an agency that was under audit by my audits division."

Fagan said she was donating all money in her political action committee to the Oregon Humane Society.

Associated Press reporter Susan Haigh in Hartford, Connecticut, contributed to this report.

Trump accuser says many in her generation didn't report rape

By JENNIFER PELTZ and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A magazine columnist who says Donald Trump raped her in a department store's dressing room two decades before he became president acknowledged Monday that she never followed her own advice to readers that they report sexual attacks to police.

E. Jean Carroll told a federal civil court jury that the reason was generational.

The 79-year-old said that as "a member of the Silent Generation," she was conditioned to keep her chin up and not to complain.

"The fact that I never went to the police is not surprising for somebody my age," she testified as Trump lawyer Joe Tacopina cross-examined Carroll about why she never went to authorities about the alleged rape, which Trump denies. Carroll said she had called police only once in her life, when she feared the mailbox at a home where she was staying was going to be damaged on Halloween.

"You would call police if a mailbox was attacked," Tacopina asked, "but not if you yourself were attacked?"

Carroll replied that at the time, she was ashamed of what she alleges happened. She later added that she was mindful of Trump's power and connections in New York and "didn't think police would take me seriously."

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Research has repeatedly found that rapes and sexual assaults are among the types of violent crime least likely to be reported to police. An annual U.S. crime victimization survey found that less than 23% of rapes and sexual assaults were reported in 2021 and 2020, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Carroll on Monday wrapped up three days of testimony in the trial stemming from her lawsuit against Trump. The trial is due to continue Tuesday with other witnesses on her behalf. Trump, who traveled to Scotland on Monday to open a new golf course at his resort near Aberdeen, Scotland, has not attended the trial. Jurors are expected to see parts of a recording of him answering questions under oath last fall.

Carroll has said the then-real estate magnate raped her in the spring of 1996 at the tony Bergdorf Goodman store after they went into a dressing room together in an encounter that she said was fun and flirtatious until Trump became violent. She said she eventually kned him and fled.

Trump, 76, says that he was never at the store with Carroll and never knew her beyond a fleeting moment when a 1987 picture was taken of them in a group setting.

Shortly before Carroll first took the stand last week, Trump called the rape accusation "a fraudulent & false story" on his social media platform.

Seeking to cast Carroll's allegation as fiction, Tacopina on Monday brought up a 2012 episode of "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" in which a male character briefly speaks about consensually acting out a sexual fantasy that involves bursting in on a woman trying on lingerie in a Bergdorf Goodman dressing room. Jurors saw an email in which someone mentioned the episode to Carroll after she went public with her claim in 2019.

Carroll testified that she has never seen the episode, didn't know about it before receiving the email and didn't make up her accusation off TV. She said she wasn't entirely surprised at the points of similarity.

"The 'Law & Order' writers are very good about keying into the psyches of their viewers," said Carroll, asserting that many people have misplaced fantasies about rape.

Her renewed testimony came shortly after Tacopina asked Judge Lewis A. Kaplan, who is overseeing the civil proceedings, to declare a mistrial because of rulings he made that Tacopina said favored Carroll. The judge rejected the request.

Carroll filed suit against Trump in November, under a New York state law that temporarily allows sexual assault victims to sue over alleged attacks that happened even decades ago.

Amid a flurry of public denials and insults from Trump that prompted Carroll to add a defamation claim to the lawsuit, Trump has insisted that Carroll was motivated by political reasons and a desire to sell copies of her 2019 memoir.

Carroll has testified that she spoke out because of the #MeToo movement, which gained prominence in 2017.

Carroll wrote an advice column for Elle magazine for nearly three decades, and Tacopina confronted her Monday with instances in which she advised contacting law enforcement authorities after people wrote in about sexual assaults and threats from partners and exes.

"I always — in most cases — advised my readers to go to the police," Carroll acknowledged.

Tacopina also pointed out that although Carroll's memoir described sexual assaults by multiple men over the course of her life, Trump was the only one she sued. And, although Trump has insisted he had no sexual encounter — indeed, "no anything" — with Carroll, his attorney asked her whether what allegedly happened could "somehow be viewed as consensual."

"It was not consensual," she said emphatically.

The Associated Press typically does not name people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they come forward publicly, as Carroll has done.

Democratic Washington Gov. Jay Inslee won't seek 4th term

By GENE JOHNSON and ED KOMENDA Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat who has sought to make the state a leader on progressive policies from climate change to gun violence prevention, said Monday he will not seek a fourth term in office.

The 72-year-old's announcement clears the way for younger members of the party to run. Attorney General Bob Ferguson, who gained a national profile by challenging the travel ban and other policies of former President Donald Trump, and state Public Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz have expressed interest.

"As governor, I have seen my role as inspiring our state ever forward and ever higher," Inslee said. "I'm gratified to be able to say that this approach has worked to improve Washingtonians lives in many ways and many places."

Inslee, who is the longest-serving governor in office in the U.S., was first elected in 2012 and became only the second Washington governor elected to three consecutive terms. Washington does not have term limits.

He made a bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020 on an environmental platform, but struggled to gain traction in a crowded Democratic field and had trouble meeting the requirements needed to appear on two high-profile stages: the third Democratic National Committee debate in Houston and a CNN town hall focused on climate change.

Among his accomplishments he lists a cap-and-trade system for carbon emissions in the state and a trio of gun violence prevention measures that he signed into law last month, including a ban on semi-automatic assault rifles that is already being challenged in court by gun rights advocates.

Early this year the state Supreme Court upheld a capital gains tax Inslee promoted as a way to address what was considered the nation's most regressive tax system.

He also vowed to protect gay rights and abortion access as conservative states constrained them, and he bought the state a three-year stockpile of a popular abortion drug in anticipation of court rulings that could limit its availability.

Inslee said he still has work to do before his exit, including collaborating with legislators and community leaders to address Washington's homelessness crisis and speeding efforts to broaden behavioral health services.

Inslee served eight terms in the U.S. House before narrowly beating Republican Rob McKenna, then the state attorney general, to become governor. He won his most recent reelection, against Republican Loren Culp, by more than 13 percentage points.

His liberal politics made him a boogeyman to critics on the right, who argued that he infringed on individual liberties. Soon after Washington suffered the first known COVID-19 outbreak in the nation, he issued emergency orders mandating mask wearing and requiring that state employees and health workers be vaccinated.

Washington's death rate from the pandemic was among the nation's lowest; Inslee said in congressional testimony last year that his measures helped prevent roughly 17,000 deaths in the state. But the mandates were relentlessly criticized and challenged in court, including in an unsuccessful lawsuit by state troopers and other state employees.

"He kept us safe and secure through the coronavirus pandemic, and delivered transformational policies on climate change, economic justice, and gun violence prevention," Shasti Conrad, chair of the state Democratic Party, said in a statement.

The Washington State Republican Party said the governor's tenure has been marked by missteps and poor decisions.

"It's time to turn the page on the disastrous Inslee era in Washington State," WSRP Chairman Caleb Heimlich said in a statement. "His decision to not seek a fourth term presents an opportunity to elect a Republican governor who will put Washingtonians first and prioritize the needs of our communities."

Attacks on delivery drivers add fears among gig workers

By ALEXANDRA OLSON and WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — A homeowner fired shots at a couple's car when they mistakenly turned onto his property while making an Instacart delivery. A Florida man was charged with killing and dismembering an Uber Eats delivery driver who brought food to his home. A woman was kidnapped and sexually assaulted while making a DoorDash delivery to a hotel.

Ride-hailing and food delivery companies say such violent episodes are exceedingly rare among the millions of trips completed each week, and point to numerous safety measures they have taken over the years.

But the three attacks, which occurred within days of each other in Florida last month, sent new ripples of fear among some app-based drivers, who say company safety policies are still better geared toward customers than workers.

Winifred Kinanda, who sometimes drives for Instacart in the San Francisco Bay Area, said she had never felt unsafe making deliveries for the grocery app until she heard about the Florida couple. That day, she got an Instacart order and constantly checked to make sure she had the right address, saying she felt particularly vulnerable as a person of color.

"It got me scared," said Kinanda, an immigrant from Kenya who also drives for Uber and Lyft to supplement her income as an elder caregiver. "At the end of the day, being Black is really hard. People see us and think we are doing something wrong."

A Pew Research Center poll in 2021 found that 16% of people in the U.S. had earned money from an online gig platform. That poll found that 35% of them have felt unsafe while doing those jobs, including 19% who said they had experienced unwanted sexual advances.

Ride-hailing and delivery driving are among the deadliest occupations in the country, according to occupational fatalities and injury data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which includes delivery workers for companies like Instacart and DoorDash in its "driver/sales" category and Uber and Lyft drivers in its "taxi" category. While most deaths and injuries are from traffic accidents, the data also shows drivers are more at risk of assaults than other occupations.

The activist group Gig Workers Rising said on-the-job deaths and injuries among gig workers are almost certainly undercounted because the companies are not obligated to report such incidents to government agencies for workers who are not direct employees. The group also said that other sources, such as police reports, may not note that a gig driver was working when they were killed.

In a report released Monday, Gig Workers Rising said its own research found that 80 app-based workers have been victims of homicides while on job between 2017 and 2022. The majority were ride-hailing drivers, but at least 20 delivery workers were also killed, according to the report, which relied on press accounts, court records and police reports.

More difficult to quantify are threats that gig drivers encounter frequently but rarely make headlines, including traffic accidents, robberies, carjackings and harassment. While Uber and Lyft have released safety reports that includes some of that data, the major food delivery apps do not, and Uber does not do so for Uber Eats trips.

Roberto Moreno, 48, stopped working as both a ride-hailing and food deliver driver in San Diego County at the beginning of this year because of safety concerns.

Moreno said he joined a WhatsApp group with other Latino gig drivers to support each other while they were on the job, from helping each other with flat tires to activating geolocation during shifts for safety.

"We have to look out for ourselves because the companies don't do it," said Moreno, who worked for Grubhub and Postmates, which was bought out by Uber Eats in 2020, as well as Lyft and Uber.

Drivers also complain they can't be sure who is getting into their cars because it's too easy for riders to use fake names, nicknames or order rides for other people.

The companies have drivers take "a selfie, do background checks on us (and) collect all of our personal information" said Moreno, who belongs to a driver-led union called Rideshare Drivers United. "But we don't know anything about the passengers or the people who we're delivering to."

In response to those concerns, Uber said it started an audit last fall of rider accounts and began freezing

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those with obviously fake names. The company also has an extra layer of verification for users who use anonymous forms of payment such as prepaid cards.

"We have heard loud and clear from drivers that they want more information about who they are picking up," Uber said in a statement.

Critics also say gig workers are more vulnerable because as contract workers, they often don't have the right to benefits such as worker compensation or health insurance. DoorDash and Instacart both provide free automatic insurance for on-the-job injuries or deaths, while Uber and Lyft offer drivers insurance policies for accidents.

DoorDash, Grubhub, Instacart, Uber and Lyft have added safety features to their apps over the years, including emergency buttons that allow people to silently connect with emergency services or private security, and GPS-sharing features that allow friends or family to track rides.

DoorDash last fall introduced new technology to automatically check in on a worker if a delivery is taking longer than expected, while Grubhub is rolling out a new feature this year that will send ID and location data to emergency responders if workers call 911 via the app.

Gig worker advocates say they want deeper changes, arguing erratic pay and fear of being deactivated from the platform pressures workers into accepting risky jobs or continue driving with belligerent riders.

The Chicago Gig Alliance, for instance, is campaigning for a local ordinance that would require companies to conduct passenger verification, give notice before suspending drivers, and allow them to appeal such decisions.

Kinanda said she feels safer making deliveries than giving rides. She said she appreciates an Uber policy that allows her to cancel trips for safety reasons with no penalty, but erratic pay sometimes forces her working into the night, which she tries to avoid because of drunken passengers.

But other gig workers say they prefer ride-hailing because delivery comes with more daily nuisances and danger.

Sedeq Alshujaa, 29, said he stopped doing food delivery three years ago and sticks to ride-hailing.

He said delivery workers are often sent to neighborhoods they don't know and get suspicious looks while trying to find the right door. "People don't know why you're there," said Alshujaa, who spoke in Arabic through a translator from the Service Employees International Union.

Once, a dog tried to bite him when he opened a gate. Another time, he had to deliver a pizza during a protest in Oakland. He called the customer and asked them if they could meet at his car, but they refused to leave their building. He left the pizza at the building's front door and notified the customer, who reported not receiving the order. The cost of the food was deducted from his earning.

"The driver is always the one who takes the blame and loses," Alshujaa said.

Ryan Reynolds, Snoop Dogg in mix to buy Ottawa's NHL team?

OTTAWA, Ontario (AP) — There appears to be celebrity interest in buying the Ottawa Senators, the National Hockey League team for sale in Canada's capital city.

Rap impresario Snoop Dogg said in an Instagram post Monday that he was "looking forward" to being part of a bid by Los Angeles-based businessman Neko Sparks, who would be the first Black owner of an NHL team.

"I WANNA BRING HOCKEY TO OUR COMMUNITY," Snoop Dogg wrote.

Last week, Canadian actor Ryan Reynolds was reportedly linked to a bid that would top \$1 billion for the team. Neither Sparks nor Reynolds have publicly confirmed their interest in buying the Senators.

Reynolds and fellow actor Rob McElhenney last month basked in the storybook run of their Welsh soccer club, Wrexham, which secured promotion to the fourth tier of the English game.

The board of directors of Senators Sports & Entertainment announced in November that a process has been initiated for the sale of the club. The board retained Galatioto Sports Partners, a firm specializing in the sports finance and advisory business, as its financial adviser.

"A condition of any sale will be that the team remains in Ottawa," the team said at the time.

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Senators owner Eugene Melnyk died last year at 62 after battling an illness. He had previously said he planned to leave the team to his daughters, Anna and Olivia. Melnyk purchased the Senators in 2003 for \$92 million at a time when the franchise faced bankruptcy and a tenuous future in the nation's capital.

A recent valuation by Forbes listed the Senators at \$800 million, 24th out of the NHL's 30 teams.

Under Melnyk, the Senators played in the Stanley Cup final in 2007 when Ottawa lost in five games to the Anaheim Ducks. Ottawa nearly returned to the Cup final a decade later but lost the deciding game of the conference final in double overtime. Since that loss, the Senators have missed the playoffs six straight seasons.

The team has played at the Canadian Tire Centre in a former suburb since the arena opened in 1996. The team has expressed interest in building an arena at a site closer to downtown Ottawa.

AP NHL: <https://apnews.com/hub/nhl> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

'El Chapo' sons charged with smuggling cheap fentanyl to US

By CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN and MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — With Sinaloa cartel boss Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán serving a life sentence, his sons steered the family business into fentanyl, establishing a network of labs churning out massive quantities of the cheap, deadly drug that they smuggled into the U.S., prosecutors revealed in a recent indictment.

Although Guzmán's trial revolved around cocaine shipments, the case against his sons exposes the inner workings of a cartel undergoing a generational shift as it worked "to manufacture the most potent fentanyl and to sell it in the United States at the lowest price," according to the indictment unsealed April 14 in Manhattan.

Synthetic opioids — mostly fentanyl — now kill more Americans every year than died in the Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined, feeding an argument among some politicians that the cartels should be branded terrorist organizations and prompting once-unthinkable calls for U.S. military intervention across the border.

"The problem with fentanyl, as some people at the State Department told me, has to be repositioned. It's not a drug problem; it's a poisoning problem," said Alejandro Hope, a security analyst in Mexico, who died Friday. "Very few people go out deliberately looking for fentanyl."

Hope predicted fentanyl would probably become an issue in next year's U.S. elections, but he opposed any threat of U.S. intervention, saying "I don't think that would be a very good way of addressing a public health issue."

The groundwork for the U.S. fentanyl epidemic was laid more than 20 years ago, with aggressive over-prescribing of the synthetic opioid oxycodone. As U.S. authorities clamped down on its prescription, users moved to heroin, which the Sinaloa cartel happily supplied.

But making its own fentanyl — far more potent and versatile than heroin — in small, easily concealed labs was a game changer. The cartel went from its first makeshift fentanyl lab to a network of labs concentrated in the northern state of Sinaloa in less than a decade.

"These are not super labs, because they give people the illusion that they're like pharmaceutical labs, you know, very sophisticated," said Mike Vigil, former head of international operations for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. "These are nothing more than metal tubs and they use wooden paddles — even shovels — to mix the chemicals."

A single cartel "cook" can press fentanyl into 100,000 counterfeit pills every day to fool Americans into thinking they're taking Xanax, Percocet or oxycodone. The pills are smuggled over the border to supply what son Iván Archivaldo Guzmán Salazar said are "streets of junkies," the indictment said.

Fentanyl is so cheap to make that the cartel reaps massive profits even wholesaling the drug at 50 cents per pill, prosecutors said.

The drug's potency makes it particularly dangerous. The narcotic dose of fentanyl is so close to the lethal dose that a pill meant to ensure a high for a habituated user can easily kill a less experienced person taking something they didn't know was fentanyl.

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Between August 2021 and August of last year, more than 107,000 Americans died from drug overdoses, most from synthetic opioids. Last year, the DEA seized more than 57 million fentanyl-laced counterfeit prescription pills, according to the New York indictment.

To protect and expand that business, the "Chapitos," as the sons are known, have turned to grotesque violence, prosecutors said.

Enforcers Ivan Archivaldo Guzmán Salazar and Jesus Alfredo Guzmán Salazar are the lead defendants among 23 associates charged in the New York indictment. Ovidio Guzmán López, alias "the Mouse," who allegedly pushed the cartel into fentanyl, is charged in another indictment in the same district. Mexico arrested him in January and the U.S. government has requested extradition. Joaquín Guzmán López is charged in the Northern District of Illinois

According to the Guzmán Salazar indictment, the cartel does some lab testing on its product but conducts more grisly human testing on kidnapped rivals or addicts who are injected until they overdose.

The purity of the cartel's fentanyl "varies greatly depending on the method and skill of the particular manufacturer," prosecutors noted. After a user overdosed on one batch, it was still shipped to the U.S.

When the elder Guzmán and Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada led the Sinaloa cartel, it operated with a certain degree of restraint. But with Guzmán serving a life sentence and Zambada believed to be suffering from health issues, the Chapitos moved aggressively to avoid a power vacuum that could fragment the cartel.

"What was really a unique advantage of the Sinaloa cartel and El Chapo was the ability to calibrate violence," said Vanda Felbab-Brown, a senior fellow in the Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology at the Brookings Institute.

The wide-ranging New York indictment against the Guzmán Salazar brothers details their penchant for feeding enemies to their pet tigers and describes how they tortured two Mexican federal agents, ripping through one's muscles with a corkscrew then stuffing the holes with chile peppers before shooting him.

The indictment also provides context to some recent violence in Mexico.

In August 2022, gunmen shot up Ciudad Juarez across from El Paso, Texas. Two prison inmates and nine civilians in the city were killed. U.S. prosecutors say the Chapitos' security arm ordered their local gang associates to commit the violence, targeting a rival cartel's businesses.

"This is not their father's Sinaloa cartel," Felbab-Brown said. "These guys just operate in very different mindsets than their father."

The Guzmán Salazar indictment makes an initial attempt at disrupting the cartel's supply chain, naming four people tied to a China-based chemical company and a broker in Guatemala who allegedly helped the cartel get the chemicals and even instructed them on the best recipes for fentanyl.

"When they talk about labs and you're trying to focus in on labs, that's not going to have an impact unless you get the finished product or the precursor chemicals," Vigil said.

Mexico's government has stumbled through the mixed messaging of its security forces playing up their decommissioning of labs even while President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has asserted that fentanyl is not being produced in Mexico.

In congressional testimony Thursday, DEA Administrator Anne Milgram was pressed about whether Mexico and China are doing enough to cooperate with U.S.

"We want the Mexicans to work with us and we want them to do more," Milgram said, adding that the DEA wouldn't hesitate to go after public officials in Mexico or elsewhere should it find evidence of ties to the cartels.

Experts say López Obrador is one obstacle to slowing the cartels' fentanyl production. After U.S. prosecutors announced the concerted effort against the Sinaloa cartel, López Obrador reacted angrily. The president accused the U.S. government of "spying" and "interference," suggesting that the case had been built on information gathered by U.S. agents in Mexico.

The president had already severely reduced Mexico's cooperation with the DEA, experts said.

Hope, the security analyst, said a fundamental problem is that López Obrador doesn't appear to understand fentanyl's threat. The president rails against a deterioration of family values in the United States and paints addiction as a moral failing.

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"He's trapped in a moral universe from 50 years ago," Hope said.

Pilots at American, Southwest, ratchet up strike threats

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

DALLAS (AP) — Pilots at American Airlines have voted to authorize a strike, and Southwest Airlines pilots are preparing to join them, as unions put more pressure on the airlines to approve new contracts with hefty pay raises.

The actions by pilots are highly unlikely to lead to walkouts anytime soon.

Federal law prohibits airline unions from striking without the approval of a U.S. mediation board — a rare step that has not occurred with negotiations at either American or Southwest. Congress and the president can also act to prevent a strike if one appears imminent.

Airline unions like to take strike votes, however, which they believe increase their leverage at the bargaining table. American, Southwest and United Airlines are under pressure to match or beat terms that rival Delta Air Lines accepted with its pilots, who earlier this year won 34% raises over a four-year contract that will cost Delta about \$7 billion.

Some smaller airlines have experienced pilot shortages, and the largest carriers have all strained to hire and train enough new pilots to meet surging travel demand. That gives the unions more bargaining power than usual.

At American Airlines, the Allied Pilots Association said Monday that more than 96% of its 15,000 members voted, and among those who did, 99% favored authorizing the union to call for a strike.

A spokeswoman for the Fort Worth, Texas-based airline said American is confident that it can reach an agreement with the union quickly.

"We understand that a strike-authorization vote is one of the important ways pilots express their desire to get a deal done, and we respect the message of voting results," said the spokeswoman, Sarah Jantz.

The American pilots' union said it is also seeking scheduling changes that union officials say will improve efficiency and prevent the kind of widespread delays and cancellations seen last summer.

"The summer travel season is almost here, and we're all wondering whether this will be another summer of uncertainty for American Airlines," union President Ed Sicher said.

American pilots planned to picket later Monday at airports around the country.

Members of the Southwest Airlines Pilots Association began voting Monday on a strike-authorization measure that is expected to pass easily.

Adam Carlisle, Southwest's president of labor relations, said the vote will not affect the Dallas-based airline's operations. He said negotiations are scheduled to resume this week with help from federal mediators, and the airline hopes to reach an agreement with pilots that "places them competitively in the industry."

Environmental groups sue FAA over SpaceX Texas rocket launch

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Wildlife and environmental groups sued the Federal Aviation Administration on Monday over SpaceX's launch last month of its giant rocket from Texas.

SpaceX's Starship soared 24 miles (39 kilometers) high before exploding over the Gulf of Mexico on April 20. The rocket's self-destruct system caused the nearly 400-foot (120-meter) rocket to blow up, as it spun out of control just minutes into the test flight.

An attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, one of the plaintiffs, said the groups are suing over what they consider to be the FAA's failure to fully consider the environmental impacts of the Starship program near Boca Chica Beach in South Texas. They asked the court to throw out the five-year license the FAA granted to SpaceX.

The FAA declined comment, noting it doesn't comment on ongoing litigation. The agency is overseeing the accident investigation and has ordered all SpaceX Starships grounded until it's certain that public safety will not be compromised.

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Over the weekend, SpaceX founder and chief executive, Elon Musk, said his company could be ready to launch the next Starship in six to eight weeks with the FAA's OK.

No injuries or significant damage to public property were reported from any of the rocket wreckage or flying pad debris. A large crater was carved into the concrete pad, as most of the rocket's 33 main engines ignited at liftoff.

The launch pad is on a remote site on the southernmost tip of Texas, just below South Padre Island, and about 20 miles from Brownsville.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reported last week that large concrete chunks, stainless steel sheets, metal and other objects were hurled thousands of feet (hundreds of meters) from the pad. In addition, a plume of pulverized concrete sent material up to 6.4 miles (4 kilometers) northwest of the pad, the service noted.

It was the first launch of a full-size Starship, with the sci-fi-looking spacecraft on top the huge booster rocket. The company plans to use it to send people and cargo to the moon and, ultimately, Mars. NASA wants to use Starship to ferry astronauts to the lunar surface as soon as 2025.

Joining the Center for Biological Diversity in the lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Washington, are the American Bird Conservancy, Surfrider Foundation, Save RGV (Rio Grande Valley) and the Carrizo/Comecrudo Nation of Texas.

"It's vital that we protect life on Earth even as we look to the stars in this modern era of spaceflight," the Center for Biological Diversity's Jared Margolis said in a statement. "Federal officials should defend vulnerable wildlife and frontline communities, not give a pass to corporate interests that want to use treasured coastal landscapes as a dumping ground for space waste."

Over the weekend, Musk said changes are being made at the launch pad to avoid what he called a dust storm and "rock tornado" at the next launch.

"To the best of our knowledge there has not been any meaningful damage to the environment that we're aware of," Musk said.

Musk has promised to make improvements to the next Starship before it flies. The self-destruct system will need to be modified, he said, so that the rocket explodes immediately — not 40 seconds or so afterward, as was the case with this inaugural run, he said.

His remarks were made to a subscriber-only Twitter chat Saturday night that was later posted by others online.

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Barbie unveils Anna May Wong doll for AAPI Heritage Month

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

Six months after she was immortalized with a U.S. quarter, Asian American Hollywood trailblazer Anna May Wong has received another accolade affirming her icon status — her own Barbie.

Mattel announced Monday the release of an Anna May Wong doll for Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.

The figure has her trademark bangs, eyebrows and well-manicured nails. The doll is dressed in a red gown with a shiny golden dragon design and cape, inspired by her appearance in the 1934 movie "Limehouse Blues."

Wong's niece, Anna Wong, gave her blessing and worked closely with the brand to develop the Barbie's look.

"I did not hesitate at all. It was such an honor and so exciting," Wong told The Associated Press in an email. "I wanted to make sure they got her facial features and clothing correct. And they did!"

As a child, Anna Wong owned a Barbie and Skipper doll (Barbie's little sister) and a Barbie dream house and car. She loves the idea that Asian children will now have a doll who looks like them.

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The doll is part of the Barbie "Inspiring Women" series, which features dolls in the likeness of pioneering women. Past inspirations include aviator Amelia Earhart and artist Frida Kahlo.

"As the first Asian American actor to lead a U.S. television show, whose perseverance broke down barriers for her gender and AAPI community in film and TV, Anna May Wong is the perfect fit for our Barbie Inspiring Women Series," Lisa McKnight, an executive vice president at Mattel, said in a statement.

Born in Los Angeles, the Chinese American actor is considered the first major Asian American movie star. She started out during the silent movie era in the 1920s and gained international notice in films like "The Thief of Bagdad" as well as for her fashion sense. In the 1930s, Anna May Wong was acting opposite stars like Marlene Dietrich in "Shanghai Express." But in 1937, she lost the lead role of a Chinese villager in "The Good Earth" to Luise Rainer, a white actor who went on to win a best actress Oscar.

In the ensuing decades, Anna May Wong went to Europe to act. But she later returned to the U.S. In 1951, she led her own television show, "The Gallery of Madame Liu-Tsong." The short-lived mystery series was believed to be the first with an Asian American lead.

In another first, she was the first Asian American woman to get a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for acting in 1960. She died a year later at age 56.

US says 20,000 Russians killed in Ukraine war since December

By AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House said Monday it now estimates that just since December Russia has suffered 100,000 casualties, including more than 20,000 killed, as Ukraine has rebuffed a heavy assault by Russian forces in eastern Ukraine.

In what has become a grinding war of attrition, the fiercest battles have been in the eastern Donetsk region, where Russia is struggling to encircle the city of Bakhmut in the face of dogged Ukrainian defense.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said the U.S. estimate is based on newly declassified American intelligence. He did not detail how the intelligence community derived the number.

Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in November that Russia had suffered well over 100,000 killed or wounded in the first eight months of the war. The new figures suggest that Russian losses have dramatically accelerated in recent months.

Troops from Russia's Wagner mercenary group and other forces are fighting Ukrainian troops house-to-house to try to gain control of what has become known as the "road of life" — the last remaining road west still in Ukrainian hands, which makes it critical for supplies and fresh troops. Both sides have cited gains in recent days.

Kirby said nearly half those killed since December are Wagner forces, many of them convicts who were released from prison to join Russia's fight. He said the Wagner forces were "thrown into combat and without sufficient combat or combat training, combat leadership, or any sense of organizational command and control."

The White House has repeatedly sought to highlight the cost — both human and weaponry — to Russia of Bakhmut, which it argues has limited strategic importance to the overall trajectory of the war. Some analysts, however, note that taking control Bakhmut could be helpful to Russian efforts to advance on the larger cities of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk in the Donetsk region.

Kirby said the Russian casualty count for "this little town of Bakhmut" was in line with some of the fiercest periods of fighting during World War II, including the Battle of the Bulge, the last major German offensive campaign on the Western Front, and the Guadalcanal campaign, the first major Allied offensive against Japan.

"It's three times the number of killed in action that the United States faced on the Guadalcanal campaign in World War II and that was over the course of five months," Kirby said.

Col. Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the head of Ukrainian ground forces, said Russia continued to exert "maximum effort" to take Bakhmut but that it so far had failed.

"In some parts of the city, the enemy was counterattacked by our units and left some positions," he said.

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Kirby declined to say how many Ukrainian troops have been killed or wounded in the fighting. Milley said in November that Ukrainian casualties were probably also about 100,000.

—
AP writer Lolita C. Baldor contributed reporting.

It's Met Gala time again — here's what we know so far

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Last year, it took 275,000 bright pink roses to adorn the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the Met Gala, the biggest night in fashion and one of the biggest concentrations of star power anywhere.

It remains to be seen how the museum's Great Hall will be decorated on Monday, but one thing is not in question: those entering it will look spectacular. The theme centers on the late designer Karl Lagerfeld, who made an indelible mark on luxury fashion in his long career at Chanel, Fendi and elsewhere. It is a theme not without controversy — Lagerfeld was known for contentious remarks about everything from #MeToo to curvy bodies.

Want to know what to expect now that the big day is here? Not to worry. We've dusted off our annual guide for you here, with some key updates.

WHAT IS THE MET GALA ANYWAY?

It started in 1948 as a society midnight supper, and wasn't even at the Met.

Fast forward 70-plus years, and the Met Gala is something totally different, one of the most photographed events in the world for its head-spinning red carpet — though the carpet isn't always red.

We're talking Rihanna as a bejeweled pope. Zendaya as Cinderella with a light-up gown. Katy Perry as a chandelier morphing into a hamburger. Also: Beyoncé in her "naked dress." Billy Porter as an Egyptian sun god, carried on a litter by six shirtless men. Lady Gaga's 16-minute striptease. And, last year, host Blake Lively's Versace dress — a tribute to iconic New York architecture — that changed colors in front of our eyes.

Then there's Kim Kardashian, bringing commitment to a whole other level. One year, she wore a dress so tight, she admitted she had to take breathing lessons beforehand. Two years ago, she wore a dark bodysuit that covered even her face. And last year she truly stole the carpet, showing up in Marilyn Monroe's actual, rhinestone-studded "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" dress (borrowed from Ripley's Believe It or Not! museum), changing the minute she got inside to protect it. There was controversy later over suspicions, denied by Ripley's, that she'd caused some damage. But still — that was an entrance. (And, folks, she's coming back — she posted a photo from Paris with Lagerfeld's famous cat, Choupette, noting she was in the French capital scoping out possibilities for this year's attire.)

It's important to note that the party has a purpose — last year, the evening earned \$17.4 million for the Met's Costume Institute, a self-funding department. Yes, that's a heckuva lot for a gala. It also launches the annual spring exhibit that brings hundreds of thousands of visitors to the museum.

But it's the carpet itself that draws the world's eyes, with the guest list — strategically withheld until the last minute — featuring a collection of notables from movies, music, fashion, sports, politics and social media that arguably makes for the highest celebrity wattage-per-square-foot of any party in the world.

WHO'S HOSTING THIS YEAR?

This year's five hosts are drawn from television (Emmy-winning writer, actor and producer Michaela Coel); the movies (Oscar-winning actor Penélope Cruz, who has worked with Chanel for more than 20 years); sports (recently retired tennis superstar Roger Federer); and music (Grammy-winning songstress Dua Lipa). Finally there is Vogue's Anna Wintour (do we need to tell you she's in fashion?) running the whole thing as usual.

IS THERE ALWAYS A THEME?

Yes. As mentioned above, the theme is Karl Lagerfeld, and the exhibit, "Karl Lagerfeld: A Line of Beauty," looks at "the designer's stylistic vocabulary as expressed in aesthetic themes that appear time and again in his fashions from the 1950s to his final collection in 2019." Once again, it has been created by the Met's star curator, Andrew Bolton.

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DOES EVERYONE FOLLOW THE THEME?

Not really. Some eschew it and just go for big and crazy. But expect some guests to carefully research the theme and come in perfect sync. It was hard to beat the carpet, for example, when the theme was "Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination" and Rihanna came as the pope, Zendaya channeled Joan of Arc, and Perry navigated the crowd with a set of enormous angel wings. For Lagerfeld, the clothes may be a bit more, er, down to earth.

HOW MUCH DO I HAVE TO PAY FOR A MET GALA TICKET?

Wrong question. You cannot just buy a ticket. The right question is: If I were famous or powerful and got invited, how much would it cost?

OK, IF I WERE FAMOUS OR POWERFUL AND GOT INVITED, HOW MUCH WOULD IT COST?

Well, you might not pay yourself. Generally companies buy tables. A fashion label would then host its desired celebrities. This year, the cost has gone up, as it does every few years due to rising expenses: It's now \$50,000 for an individual ticket, and tables start at \$300,000.

SO WHO GETS INVITED?

This year, there will be roughly 400 guests — similar to recent years but still lower than pre-pandemic highs of 500-600. Wintour and her team still get to approve every guest.

Trying to predict? Take out your pen and jot down some of your favorite names, the buzzier the better. Newly minted Oscar winners, for example, are a good bet. Broadway is a special favorite of Wintour's. She also loves tennis — this is not fashionable Federer's first Met Gala. Now, cross everyone off your list except the very top. At this gala, everybody's A-list.

THAT MUST BE AN EXAGGERATION.

Not really. Ask Tina Fey. She went in 2010 and later described walking around trying to find somebody "normal" to sit and talk with. That ended up being Barbara Walters.

HOW CAN I WATCH?

You can watch the whole carpet unfold on a Vogue livestream. If you're in New York, you can also join fans across the street, behind barricades, on Fifth Avenue or even further east on Madison. Timothée Chalamet has been known to greet fans. And the AP will have a livestream of departures from the Mark Hotel, where many gala guests get ready.

DO WE KNOW WHO'S COMING? AND WHO ISN'T?

It's secret. But reports slip out. You can count on various celebrity Chanel ambassadors showing up. Lively left some fashion fans disappointed when she revealed she's not attending this year.

WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE?

Entering the museum, guests walk past what is usually an impossibly enormous flower arrangement in the lobby, with perhaps an orchestra playing nearby, and over to cocktails. Or, they head to view the exhibit. Cocktails are 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., but the most famous — or those who plan to make the biggest entrance — sometimes come (fashionably) later.

Around 8 p.m., guests are summoned to dinner — perhaps by a team of buglers ("Are they going to do that between every course?" actor Gary Oldman asked aloud one year).

IS IT FUN FOR EVERYONE?

Occasionally, someone says no. Fey, in a comic rant to David Letterman in 2015, described the gala as a "jerk parade" and said it included everyone you'd ever want to punch, if you had millions of arms. Amy Schumer left early in 2016 and said later she felt awkward and like it was "a punishment."

SO THEY NEVER CAME BACK, RIGHT?

Wrong. Schumer was back in 2017. And then last year again.

Hey, this is the Met Gala.

For more coverage of the 2023 Met Gala, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/met-gala>

UK's diverse communities ambivalent about king's coronation

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Musician Deronne White is ready to play on King Charles III's coronation day. The flautist and his fellow young musicians aren't playing anything regal or solemn — they're planning to parade through south London's streets entertaining crowds with an uplifting "coronation carnival" set mixing gospel, jazz, grime, disco and rap. There'll even be a calypso take on the U.K. national anthem.

While he's excited about the gig, White says he has mixed feelings about the coronation. Like some others at the Brixton Chamber Orchestra, White is a descendant of migrants from Jamaica — a former British colony and Commonwealth member that wants to cut its ties with the monarchy and has called for the U.K. royals to address their historical ties to slavery.

"Personally it's a little bit hard to connect to the whole occasion," he said. "I think that the coronation could possibly allow people like me to try and connect to (the monarchy). But it can be a bit tough."

Towns, cities and villages across the U.K. will be awash with Union flags and patriotic decorations to celebrate Charles' coronation at Westminster Abbey this weekend, and officials say the festivities will bring Britain's diverse communities together. But the event is viewed with a large dose of ambivalence by some in the U.K., not least those with African Caribbean backgrounds and other minorities for whom the British Empire's past wrongs still loom large.

While slavery and the heyday of colonialism may be long gone, the royal family has in recent years struggled to grapple with new accusations of institutional racism — most notably from Prince Harry's wife, Meghan.

The Duchess of Sussex, a biracial American actress, reopened the debate about the monarchy and race when she said last year that an unnamed member of the royal household had asked her how dark her baby's skin might be when she was pregnant with her first child, Archie.

Last year, there was outrage when Ngozi Fulani, a Black charity executive, complained that a close aide of Queen Elizabeth II's repeatedly questioned her at a party about where she was "really" from. Palace officials apologized and the aide, Susan Hussey, resigned.

Charles, 74, has on many occasions spoken about how much he values diversity in modern, multicultural Britain. He has paid tribute to Britain's "Windrush generation" — the West Indians, like White's great-grandparents, who helped rebuild Britain after World War II. In 2021, Charles won praise for acknowledging "the darkest days of our past" and the stain of slavery.

More recently, the monarch expressed for the first time his support for research into the links between the U.K. monarchy and the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

"I think he's definitely trying — maybe not in the best way or the fastest way, but from what I've seen, it's kind of a step in the right way," said Teigan Hastings, 17.

But Hastings, a British Jamaican who plays the tuba alongside White, said that Meghan's claims about how she was treated by her in-laws "opened up a bit of truth within the royal family."

"I guess it wasn't totally unexpected, but at the same time you think there'd be some form of acceptance ... and there hasn't really been," he said. "It's like there's nothing like us normal people can really do about it except hope for change."

The musicians say they hope that their vibrant blend of musical styles will help draw in the crowds, whatever they may think of Charles.

Across the capital in Southall, known as "Little India" — the west London neighborhood is home to one of the largest Indian populations outside India — local politician Jasbir Kaur Anand said the area's British Asians also plan to mark the coronation in their own way.

About 6,000 tickets were snapped up for a coronation shindig complete with a huge television screen broadcasting the ceremony, funfair rides and bands playing Jewish, South American and gospel music, Anand said.

She added that she will attend a street party organized by a group of local women that promises to feature "lots of Punjabi food, Punjabi dancing and singing."

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Anand, whose family moved to Britain from Singapore when the city-state gained independence, said many immigrants of her generation feel gratitude to the U.K. monarchy for embracing them and giving them the opportunities to settle and prosper.

Gulu Anand, who owns Southall's Brilliant curry house and has cooked for Charles several times over the years when he visited the neighborhood, is one vocal supporter of Charles.

Charles "actually listens to you," he said, recalling the royal's demeanor when he ate at his restaurant. "I think he is the people's king."

But Janpal Basran, who heads local charity Southall Community Alliance, said that many communities in the area are from former colonies and "remember what it was like to be ruled by others."

"So they look at the monarchy, they remember all of the associated historical baggage, for want of a better word," Basran said. "There will be people who will be thinking that the monarchy represents an institution which was repressive, discriminatory and violent. Is this something that we want to be supporting to the future?"

Patrick Vernon, a Black activist campaigning for justice for scores of Caribbean migrants who lost their rights as U.K. citizens because of a legal loophole, said Charles could do so much more to show his subjects that the monarchy takes diversity seriously.

He drew attention to a 2021 investigation by the Guardian newspaper that revealed the royal household is still exempt from equality laws preventing race and sex discrimination.

"I think Charles could be in a unique position to start to actually influence that agenda," he said. "It's important to demonstrate change, demonstrate that there's a clear marker that we're different, that we're moving towards the 21st century."

Follow AP's coverage of King Charles III at <https://apnews.com/hub/king-charles-iii>

Biden's diverse coalition of support risks fraying in 2024

By STEVE PEOPLES and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Sen. Joe Lieberman, the Connecticut Democrat-turned-Independent long known for his centrist views, voted for Joe Biden in 2020. But as Biden's reelection campaign begins, Lieberman is preparing to recruit a third-party candidate capable of defeating the Democratic president.

"Centrists and moderates feel that he's governed more from the left than they hoped," Lieberman, a leader of the group, No Labels, said of Biden in an interview. "He hasn't been able to be the unifier that he promised to be."

Biden's political challenges are not confined to voters in the middle. In the days since he formally launched his 2024 campaign, key members of the sprawling political coalition that lifted him over former President Donald Trump in 2020 are far from excited about the prospect of four more years. That underscores the test confronting Biden as he aims to motivate the coalition of African Americans, Latinos, young people, suburban voters and independents to show up for him again.

John Paul Mejia, the 20-year-old spokesman for the progressive Sunrise Movement, says Biden has simply not done enough to ensure the young voters who rallied behind him in 2020 would do so again.

"Young people are starving for more," Mejia said, pointing to Biden's recent decision to approve two controversial fossil fuel projects in Alaska. "Biden has to demonstrate the extent to which he's willing to be a fighter. We've seen this sort of two-step on the promises he made to young people."

Biden has also struggled to fulfill key promises to Black voters, perhaps the most loyal group in his political base. While he tapped Ketanji Brown Jackson to become the first Black woman on the Supreme Court, he has been unable to follow through on pledges to protect voting rights against a wave of Republican-backed restrictions or enact policing reform to help stop violence against people of color at the hands of law enforcement.

"There's work to be done," said Rep. Jasmine Crockett, D-Texas, a 42-year-old African American former civil rights attorney who joined Congress in January. "I'm not going to sugar coat it."

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Crockett recalled the palpable excitement among the Black community for Barack Obama's reelection. With Biden, there's "a number of people who are concerned and scared" largely because of his age, while others are "indifferent and waiting," despite what she described as Biden's overall strong record of achievement.

Nearly 18 months before Election Day 2024, however, it's unclear how much this lack of enthusiasm will weigh on Biden's reelection prospects. For all the concern, no high-profile Democratic primary challengers have emerged, and none are expected to. To date, only progressive author Marianne Williamson and anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. are mounting symbolic challenges to Biden, who has the official support of the Democratic National Committee.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, Biden's chief rival in the 2020 primary, told The Associated Press just hours after Biden announced that he was endorsing the president and encouraged other progressive leaders to do so as well.

"I intend to do everything I can to see that he is reelected," Sanders said in an interview.

Instead of excitement for the 80-year-old president's reelection, leaders from key factions in Biden's coalition report a serious sense of duty — and fear of the alternative. Trump is currently considered the favorite to claim the Republican presidential nomination, although he's facing opposition from a half dozen rivals.

"It would be a mistake to underestimate Trump or whoever the Republican candidate might be," Sanders said. "There's a lot of discontent in this country. There's a lot of anger in this country."

Indeed, 74% of U.S. adults believe the country is headed in the wrong direction, according to an AP-NORC poll conducted a week before Biden's announcement.

The poll found that only about half of Democrats think Biden should run again. Despite their reluctance, 81% of Democrats said they would probably support Biden in a general election if he is the nominee. That includes 41% who said they definitely would and 40% who said they probably would.

The warning signs in the Biden coalition are clear.

Just 41% of Black adults want the Democratic president to run again, and only 55% said they are likely to support him in the general election if he is the nominee. Among Latinos, only 27% want Biden to run again in 2024 and 43% said they would definitely or probably support him.

Younger Democrats also remain a reluctant part of Biden's coalition, the AP-NORC poll shows.

Just 25% of those under age 45 said they would definitely support Biden in a general election, compared with 56% of older Democrats.

Still, an additional 51% of younger Democrats say they would probably vote for Biden in a 2024 general election.

Meanwhile, just 14% of independents — adults who don't lean toward either party, who represent a small percentage of the American electorate — want Biden to run again. And only 24% said they'd support him in the general election if he is the Democratic nominee.

Biden's team dismisses the numbers, yet acknowledges that in a party as diverse as the Democrats, some may have other preferred candidates for president. It's just that none of those other people can win, they say, adding that while Biden might not be someone's first choice, he's often everyone's second.

They cite one of Biden's favorite political aphorisms: "Don't judge me against the Almighty, judge me against the alternative."

Their confidence is grounded in Biden's experience in 2020, when he was written off by much of the party, until it unified around him at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic as a consensus candidate best positioned to defeat Trump. While Biden aides are expecting a rematch with Trump, he intends to cast all Republicans as embracing Trump-ism, both as a hedge in case another GOP candidate emerges as the party's standard-bearer and to broadly define the Republicans in an effort to help down-ballot Democrats.

Meanwhile, Biden himself has been open about there being more to do — it's in his campaign rallying cry "finish the job" — and his aides believe it is essential for him to highlight what else he wants to do with another term in office, believing that presidents who solely focus on their records lose reelection.

Biden has begun holding events to highlight popular components of his agenda that got left on the cut-

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ting room floor during the Democrats' legislative blitz over the last two years. Last week, he held a Rose Garden gathering to showcase his efforts to boost the affordability and quality of child and long-term care. And he's pushing for tougher gun laws after recent high-profile shootings and to write into law a national right to abortion.

Both are proposals his aides believe have the backing of most Americans — and are of particular importance to the Democratic coalition — but are unlikely to pass unless Democrats also win significant congressional majorities.

Aiming to address the intra-party concerns, Biden's campaign on Monday released a new ad it said was targeted at the "Biden coalition" of suburban women, Black and Latino voters, and swing and independent voters, that both lists what he's gotten done in office and what more he wants to do.

In the White House, Biden advisers, particularly chiefs of staff Ron Klain and now Jeff Zients, have kept close ties to grassroots groups across the Democratic firmament. He just secured an endorsement for reelection from the progressive group MoveOn, which said, "This moment requires urgency to solidify behind President Biden and show unified resolve to defeat MAGA and build on the progress of the last two years."

At a donor event in Washington on Friday, Biden's efforts to highlight his support from all swaths of the party were on display, with young progressive Rep. Maxwell Frost joining more establishment lawmakers like Sens. Chris Coons and Bob Casey. Investor Tom Steyer, who was among the Democrats who challenged Biden in 2020, also attended.

Allies said one key reason why the president selected Julie Chavez Rodriguez as his campaign manager was her ability to maintain close ties with a wide swath of the Democratic coalition during her time as White House director of intergovernmental affairs.

"This is not a time to be complacent," Biden said in his announcement video as he vowed to fight for freedom and warned of MAGA extremists and others who support banning abortion and books.

Meanwhile, Lieberman said he would likely soon begin interviewing potential candidates for No Label's third-party alternative to Biden and the eventual Republican nominee.

Already, No Labels has secured a spot on the presidential ballot in four states, including swing states Arizona and Colorado. Lieberman noted that the group would not field a candidate if polling suggested the so-called unity ticket does not have a viable path to the presidency.

"If No Labels does not run a bipartisan unity ticket, and the two candidates are Trump and Biden, to me, it's an easy choice," Lieberman said. "I will vote for Biden."

Peoples reported from New York. AP writer Hannah Fingerhut contributed.

Should school use 'Warrior' nickname? Tribe to have last say

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

SALAMANCA, N.Y. (AP) — The profile of a Native American man, a braid trailing down and feather jutting up, is tiled into a high school hallway, dyed into the weight room carpet and laid into the turf of the football field at Salamanca city schools.

School leaders say the omnipresent logo and "Warrior" name for the school athletic teams are sources of pride here, in the only U.S. city built on land leased from a Native American reservation.

But as New York joins states moving to ban schools' use of Indigenous nicknames and mascots because they diminish Native cultures, the tribe may have the last say over whether the logo stays. When the state Board of Regents this month voted to prohibit public schools' use of Indigenous names, it included an exception for districts that receive written approval from a federally recognized tribal nation in New York.

It has put the tribe in an awkward spot.

While the Seneca Indian Nation's leader has endorsed the ban, some citizens of the nation want to keep the logo, which was designed by a Seneca artist in the 1970s. About 38% of students in the public school system south of Buffalo, near the Pennsylvania line, are Native American, mostly citizens of the Seneca tribe.

"The logo really represents us as a community," said Marijah Skye, a 17-year-old student and Seneca

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citizen.

Superintendent Mark Beehler said he thinks it's unfair of the Regents to put any tribal nation in the middle, where its decision could upset students and the community.

"I'm really not comfortable going to the Seneca Nation and having them potentially be the bad guy here," Beehler said in an interview.

On Tuesday, the school board authorized seeking approval from the Seneca Nation to keep the logo and Warrior nickname. The Seneca Nation did not immediately issue a decision.

New York is one of at least 20 states that have taken or are considering action to address Native-themed mascots used by public schools, according to the National Congress of American Indians, which tracks the issue.

In 2001, former New York Education Commissioner Richard Mills said using Native American symbols or depictions as mascots can become "a barrier to building a safe and nurturing school community and improving academic achievement for all students." Today, there are more than 100 schools representing over 50 New York districts that still have such mascots.

Nationwide, 966 districts have Native "themed" mascots, according to NCAI's database, with "Braves," "Chiefs," "Warriors" and "Indians" the most widely used. A push to do away with such mascots gained momentum with a campaign targeting the name of the NFL's Washington team, which in 2022 renamed itself as the Commanders.

Seneca President Rickey Armstrong Sr. endorsed New York's ban when it was proposed in November, while acknowledging the Salamanca school system's "unique relationship" with the 8,000-member nation.

"We believe the state's provision for agreements between school districts and Native nations should be rare and limited, rather than an open invitation for districts to go 'approval shopping' among Native nations," Armstrong said.

He said the nation, which operates a resort casino in Salamanca and others in Buffalo and Niagara Falls, said it would "carefully consider" how the standard may apply within the community.

Oregon, Washington state and Connecticut are among those with similar laws, forbidding schools to use Native American nicknames unless they have permission from a tribe. Last year, the school board for Montville, Connecticut, voted to drop its "Indians" nickname after the neighboring Mohegan Tribe, owner of the Mohegan Sun casino, said it would prefer a different name.

In Salamanca, school officials have been preparing for the possibility of change, soliciting community input at forums and surveying students. Beehler said the majority, but not all, of those who weighed in supported the continued use of the logo and Warriors nickname.

Salamanca resident Michala Redeye, a Seneca citizen, said Native and non-Native residents have largely united around keeping the logo. That's notable in a city that has seen divisions over issues including the property tax-exempt status of Native residents and the city's required lease payments to the Seneca Nation.

"I feel like a lot of the comments and stuff that has been put out there about the logo reminds people of why they're in the community, what they love about the community. They're tied to being a Salamanca Warrior," said Redeye, who coordinates Native American programming in the schools.

Several students who belong to the Seneca Nation said the image stirs a sense of pride.

"It's widely known," 14-year-old Jaxon Crouse said, "especially around territory as a school, and it's kind of just the community."

The Associated Press education team receives support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Black Protestant church still vital despite attendance drop

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — The wide empty spaces in pews between parishioners at a Sunday service at Zion Baptist Church in South Carolina's capital highlight a post-pandemic reality common among many Black Protestant churches nationwide.

At its heyday in the 1960s, more than 1,500 parishioners filled every seat at Zion. But membership at the historic church — a crucial meeting point for many during the Civil Rights Movement — dwindled over recent decades.

The trend has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which infected and killed Black Americans at a disproportionate rate. Zion's attendance dropped from 300 parishioners before the outbreak to 125 now.

Founded in 1865 — the year Abraham Lincoln was assassinated — Zion still has a choir capable of beautiful singing, but it too has shrunk by more than half. The stomping of feet and the call-and-response of the leader and congregation have subsided from what they were before the pandemic.

"It saddens my heart," said Calvernetta Williams, who has worshipped at Zion for 40 years. "What I really say to myself is, 'Lord, the pastor has a lot of outreach to do, and so do we ... because it'll never be the same.'"

Zion's shrinking attendance is in line with a recent Pew Research Center survey; it found a significant attendance drop among Black Protestants that is unmatched by any other major religious group. The number of Black Protestants who say they attend services monthly has fallen from 61% in 2019 to 46% now, said Pew, and they are the only group in which more than half (54%) attend services virtually.

Zion broadcasts services online, produces digital content and is active on social media. But the Rev. M. Andrew Davis said his church's virtual experience can't match in-person interactions, including the smiles of children, and how sometimes older congregants share testimonials about how God healed them.

Davis' sermon on a recent Sunday was titled: "Trust during times of trouble." He recalled the pandemic as one the most challenging times in his church's history — and offered words of hope.

"We may not ever go back to the way it was, but we can do better," Davis told parishioners.

Black Americans — two-thirds of whom are Protestant — attend church more regularly than Americans overall, and pray more often, surveys show. But patterns of worship are shifting across generations: younger Black adults attend church less often than their elders, and those who attend are less likely to do so in a predominantly Black congregation.

"It's imperative that we get our young people back," said Donnie Mack, a deacon at Zion. "As we say in old churches — if you don't see any young people, if you don't hear any babies crying, then, you're at a dying church."

Several Black church leaders said it's proved difficult to convince members to return for in-person worship. They note that many congregants are older, have inadequate access to health care, and hesitate to return to church for fear of catching a contagious illness.

A history of systemic racism and lack of economic opportunity made many Black Americans far more vulnerable to the virus. Black adults also suffer from higher rates of obesity, diabetes and asthma, making them more susceptible. They are also more likely to be uninsured.

Additionally, many Black working people had jobs deemed essential and were less able to work from home during the pandemic, raising concerns about exposing others in their often crowded households to the virus.

"The pandemic exasperated that," said the Rev. Quardricos Driskell, pastor at Beulah Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia.

Attendance at his 160-year-old church dropped from a peak of more than 200 people who met in two Sunday services in the early 2000s, to less than half that at a single service.

"We're lucky if we have 100 on any given Sunday," Driskell said.

Driskell tries to reach young people by talking openly with them about issues including race, sexuality and gender identity.

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"What does it mean to be gay, Christian and single?" he said. "How do we live out our lives authentically as human beings, but yet still maintaining levels of faith ... those are messages that are resonating with younger people."

Although his congregation has been welcoming to the LGBTQ community, Driskell said that historically that has not been the case for the Black church.

"The Black church is kind of grappling with and struggling with this idea of religious progressivism."

Despite the attendance drop, academics, pastors and parishioners agree that churches remain fundamental to Black communities, providing refuge and hope, especially during times of challenge.

"No pillar of the African American community has been more central to its history, identity, and social justice vision than the 'Black Church,'" Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. wrote in 'The Black Church,' his companion volume to the PBS series.

"For a people systematically brutalized and debased by the inhumane system of slavery, followed by a century of Jim Crow racism, the church provided a refuge: a place of racial and individual self-affirmation, of teaching and learning, of psychological and spiritual sustenance, of prophetic faith," he wrote.

Although there's broad respect for the historical role of Black churches, including their crucial role fighting for racial equality, polls show that there's also a perception among Black Americans that they have lost influence in recent decades.

"It still functions in the same way: It's a source of hope for people who cannot hold on to political promises, they can't necessarily go to the law and get the things that we need and give them the safety that we need," said Tamara Lomax, professor of religious studies at Michigan State University who specializes in the Black church.

But attendance had been dwindling — even before the pandemic and the 2020 protests over racial justice — because the way people connected to the church had changed, Lomax said.

A pivotal moment came when the Black Lives Matter movement was founded. Its members, she said, embraced some of the African spirituality and religious practices that were taken from their ancestors during enslavement and rejected the Christ-centered movement that had been pivotal to the civil rights struggle.

"They didn't want to carry the patriarchal kind of Black masculinity leadership model," Lomax said.

During the pandemic, Black pastors used their influence to encourage vaccinations from the pulpit, while hosting testing clinics and vaccination events in church buildings.

"It has impacted our community pretty substantially," said the Rev. Hewitt Clifton Sawyers at West Harpeth Primitive Baptist Church in Franklin, Tennessee. Attendance at the church dropped from about 150 people before COVID to about 80 now. "The people are just really, really afraid to come back."

Sawyers said his church benefited from a rise in virtual attendance and online donations, which have financed a building renovation. Still, he lamented that many congregants have not returned in person.

"They've really gotten to the place that they can turn over in bed and flip on the television or their phone and watch the services, press a button, send their offerings and go back to sleep," he said. "It's hard to get them to want to come back to church."

Although in-person numbers dropped, some Black Protestant churches have grown if one counts a rise in virtual attendance. That's the case of Enon Baptist Tabernacle Church, which at 5,000 seats is one of Philadelphia's largest Black churches.

"I believe it has shifted for the better," said its pastor, the Rev. Alyn Waller. "Many of us have come up with the concept of virtual membership. I have people who belong to my church that don't even live in Pennsylvania."

The Rev. Eldren D. Morrison of Shaw Temple African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Georgia's Cobb County, said in-person attendance plunged by half — from 400 to about 200 — since the virus outbreak. But the pandemic helped pastors like him rethink how to connect with their congregation.

"It's teaching us that we're not necessarily looking for numbers, but we're looking for engagement," Morrison said. "Whether that's virtual, or whether that's people in pews or whether it's through some type of ministry involvement throughout the community, people are involved with the church and are growing

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their faith. And that's what the mission is in the end anyway." _____

Associated Press visual journalist Jessie Wardarski contributed.

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Today in History: May 2, Nelson Mandela claims victory

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, May 2, the 122nd day of 2023. There are 243 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 2, 1994, Nelson Mandela claimed victory in the wake of South Africa's first democratic elections; President F.W. de Klerk acknowledged defeat.

On this date:

In 1863, during the Civil War, Confederate Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson was accidentally wounded by his own men at Chancellorsville, Virginia; he died eight days later.

In 1890, the Oklahoma Territory was organized.

In 1927, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Buck v. Bell*, upheld 8-1 a Virginia law allowing the forced sterilization of people to promote the "health of the patient and the welfare of society."

In 1932, Jack Benny's first radio show, sponsored by Canada Dry, made its debut on the NBC Blue Network.

In 1941, General Mills began shipping its new cereal, "Cheerioats," to six test markets. (The cereal was later renamed "Cheerios.")

In 1970, jockey Diane Crump became the first woman to ride in the Kentucky Derby; she finished in 15th place aboard Fathom. (The winning horse was Dust Commander.)

In 1972, a fire at the Sunshine silver mine in Kellogg, Idaho, claimed the lives of 91 workers who succumbed to carbon monoxide poisoning. Longtime FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover died in Washington at age 77.

In 1997, Tony Blair, whose new Labour Party crushed John Major's long-reigning Conservatives in a national election, became at age 43 Britain's youngest prime minister in 185 years.

In 2005, Pfc. Lynndie England, the young woman pictured in some of the most notorious Abu Ghraib photos, pleaded guilty at Fort Hood, Texas, to mistreating prisoners. (A judge later threw out the plea agreement; England was then convicted in a court-martial and received a three-year sentence, of which she served half.)

In 2010, record rains and flash floods in Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee caused more than 30 deaths and submerged the Grand Ole Opry House stage.

In 2011, al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, who'd been killed hours earlier in a raid by elite American forces at his Pakistan compound, was buried at sea.

In 2018, the Boy Scouts of America announced that the group's flagship program would undergo a name change; after being known simply as the Boy Scouts for 108 years, the program would now be called Scouts BSA. (The change came as girls were about to enter the ranks.)

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama arrived in Mexico City on his first trip to Latin America since winning re-election. Dutchman Robert-Jan Derksen shot a 6-under 66 to take the first-round lead in the China Open, while 12-year-old Ye Wocheng opened with a 79 at Binhai Lake; at 12 years, 242 days, Ye became the youngest player in European Tour history, breaking Guan Tianlang's mark of 13 years, 177 days. Jeff Hanneman, 49, a founding member of heavy metal band Slayer, died in Hemet, California.

Five years ago: Attorney Rudy Giuliani said President Donald Trump had reimbursed his personal lawyer for \$130,000 in hush money paid to a porn actress days before the 2016 presidential election, comments that appeared to contradict Trump's past claims that he didn't know the source of the money. Two black men who'd been arrested for sitting at a Philadelphia Starbucks without ordering anything settled with the company for an undisclosed sum and an offer of a free college education; they settled separately with

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the city for a symbolic \$1 each and a promise to set up a \$200,000 program for young entrepreneurs.

One year ago: A draft was leaked of a Supreme Court ruling throwing out the landmark Roe v. Wade abortion rights ruling that had stood for a half century. The court cautioned that the draft was not final. (The decision would be released in essentially the same form on June 24.) Russia resumed pulverizing a Mariupol steel mill that had become the last stronghold of resistance in the bombed-out Ukrainian city, after a brief cease-fire allowed the first evacuation of civilians from the plant by the International Red Cross. Those managing to escape the city described terrifying weeks of bombardment and deprivation. A fired Philadelphia police officer was charged with murder in the shooting of a fleeing 12-year-old boy, who prosecutors said was on the ground and unarmed when the officer fired the fatal shot.

Today's Birthdays: Singer Engelbert Humperdinck is 87. Actor-activist Bianca Jagger is 78. Country singer R.C. Bannon is 78. Actor David Suchet (SOO'-shay) is 77. Singer-songwriter Larry Gatlin is 75. Rock singer Lou Gramm (Foreigner) is 73. Actor Christine Baranski is 71. Singer Angela Bofill is 69. Fashion designer Donatella Versace is 68. Actor Brian Tochi is 64. Movie director Stephen Daldry is 63. Actor Elizabeth Berridge is 61. Country singer Ty Herndon is 61. Actor Mitzi Kapture is 61. Commentator Mika Brzezinski is 56. Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb is 55. Rock musician Todd Sucherman (Styx) is 54. Wrestler-turned-actor Dwayne Johnson (AKA The Rock) is 51. Former soccer player David Beckham is 48. Rock singer Jeff Gutt (goot) (Stone Temple Pilots) is 47. Actor Jenna Von Oy is 46. Actor Kumail Nanjiani is 45. Actor Ellie Kemper is 43. Actor Robert Buckley is 42. Actor Gaius (GY'-ehs) Charles is 40. Pop singer Lily Rose Cooper is 38. Olympic gold medal figure skater Sarah Hughes is 38. Actor Thomas McDonell is 37. Actor Kay Panabaker is 33. NBA All-Star Paul George is 33. Princess Charlotte of Cambridge is 8.