

Groton Daily Independent

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Friday, May 3

Senior Menu: Tator tot hot dish, green beans, acini depepi fruit salad, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Biscuits.
School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.
Track at Sisseton, 1 p.m.
Doubles Bowling Tournament, 7 p.m.

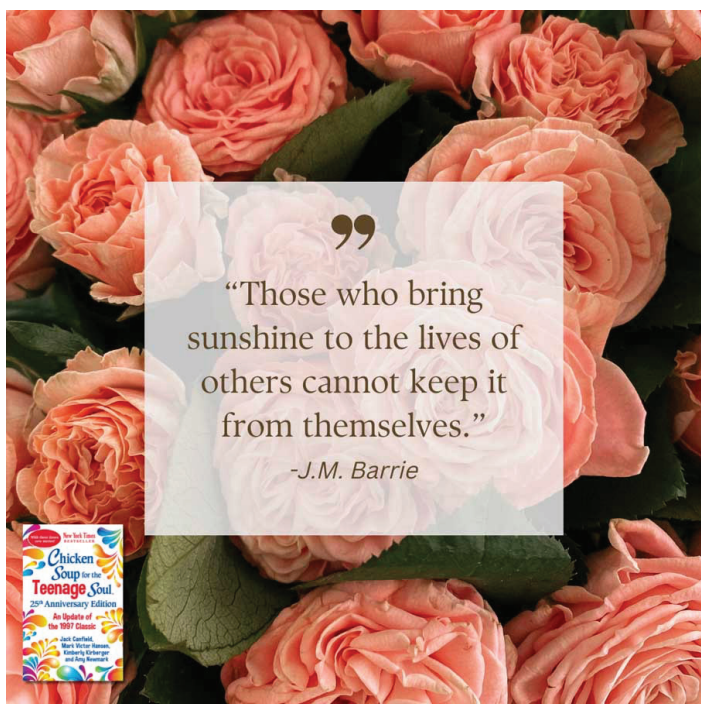
Saturday, May 4

Doubles Bowling Tournament, Noon and 3:30 p.m.
Citywide Rummage Sale, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store extended hours, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, May 5

High School Baseball at Bryant: O-R/R/A at 2 p.m., Hamlin at 4 p.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m., senior milestones and Faith Forever scholarships; choir singing; Last Day of Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's 9 a.m. (Graduate Recognition), at Zion, 11 a.m.

United Methodist: Worship with communion: At Conde, 8:30 a.m.; and at Groton, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:30 a.m.; Missions Taco Bar, 11:30 a.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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1440

In partnership with **smartasset**[™]

Peloton yesterday announced CEO Barry McCarthy was stepping down and the company was laying off 15% of its staff—around 400 people. Two board members will serve as interim co-CEOs as the fitness company struggles to rebrand and works to refinance more than \$1B in debt.

A wild male orangutan in Indonesia was observed applying a medicinal paste to a scrape on his face, according to new research. It's the first documented example of an animal self-medicating a wound using a plant with healing properties.

The Kentucky Derby will take place at Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky, tomorrow, marking the 150th "Run for the Roses." The race carries a record purse this year of \$5M—\$2M more than last year—with tomorrow's winner taking home \$3.1M. The runner-up will receive \$1M and third-place \$500K. Coverage begins at 2:30 pm ET on NBC, with Derby post time at 6:57 pm ET.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

TikTok to bring back millions of songs to its platform after settling dispute with Universal Music Group over royalty payments and AI policies; deal includes TikTok's assurances to remove AI-generated music and better credit UMG artists.

Duane Eddy, Grammy-winning guitarist and Rock & Roll Hall of Famer, dies at 86. Peter Oosterhuis, six-time Ryder Cup participant and longtime golf analyst, dies at 75.

Screen Actors Guild signs deal with Nielsen to provide viewership data for streaming content.

Science & Technology

China set to launch Chang'e 6 lunar mission to retrieve rock samples from the far side of the moon early this morning. Samples were collected from earlier lander; see what makes the far side of the moon interesting to scientists.

Scientists pinpoint cells in the brainstem that help regulate the body's immune system response; findings shed light on the brain's role in inflammation and may lead to new therapies for autoimmune diseases.

Researchers recreate the face of a 75,000-year-old Neanderthal woman after reassembling skull fragments found in an Iraqi cave.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.9%, Dow +0.9%, Nasdaq +1.5%) as investors look ahead to today's US jobs report. Apple announces \$110B share buyback—the largest in the company's history; also reports 10.5% year-over-year drop in iPhone sales amid headwinds in China.

Sony Pictures, Apollo Global extend \$26B all-cash offer to buy Paramount Global, marking Apollo's second bid to buy the entertainment giant; Paramount currently weighing merger with Skydance Media. Nvidia-backed CoreWeave raises \$1.1B in funding, valuing the cloud-computing startup at \$19B.

US weekly jobless claims hold steady at 208,000 for the week ending April 27; figure matches number of weekly jobless claims from prior week, which has been the fewest since mid-February.

Politics & World Affairs

At least 2,000 people reportedly arrested so far at dozens of US colleges over pro-Palestinian protests; crew begins cleanup at University of California, Los Angeles, campus, where at least 200 people were arrested.

Rescue teams recover and identify body of fifth construction worker who died in the collapse of Baltimore's Key Bridge in March; one construction worker remains unaccounted for.

Brood XIX cicadas begin to emerge in Arkansas, one of 17 states expected to see trillions of cicadas in a double brood event this year.

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Class of 2024's Best and Brightest Honored

The Class of 2024's best and brightest students were recognized recently at the 34th Annual Academic Excellence Recognition luncheon.

Governor Kristi Noem's office, Lieutenant Governor Larry Rhoden and the Associated School Boards of South Dakota (ASBSD) honored students who were identified as the top one percent of their senior class, from the state's Public, Private and Tribal/BIE schools on Monday (4/29).

Students designated as their high school's honoree(s) received a certificate, signed by the Governor, a commemorative South Dakota pin and the opportunity to meet and have their photo taken with Lieutenant Governor Rhoden.

"What a privilege it is for me to be here," Lieutenant Governor Rhoden told the seniors. "I want to congratulate each and every one of you."

"It's clear your futures are very bright and preparing for your future is our priority."

ASBSD President Louann Krogman shared the students "epitomize the value of hard work that is ingrained in South Dakotans" which deserved the recognition they were receiving.

"Students, today we celebrate your well-earned accomplishments," Krogman said. "You have worked so hard to reach the academic heights you have and we're thrilled to be able to recognize your achievement."

An achievement ASBSD Executive Director Dr. Douglas R. Wermedal urged students and their supporters to celebrate.

"Please, don't miss celebrating what you've accomplished," Dr. Wermedal told those in attendance. "Make sure you recognize and celebrate your academic excellence and the families who supported you."



Claire Heinrich is pictured with Lt. Governor Larry Rhoden at the Annual Academic Excellence Recognition luncheon. (Courtesy Photo)

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High School Spring Concert



The Chamber Choir sang, "Set Me as a Seal" and "Prayer of the Children" at the high school spring concert held Thursday. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



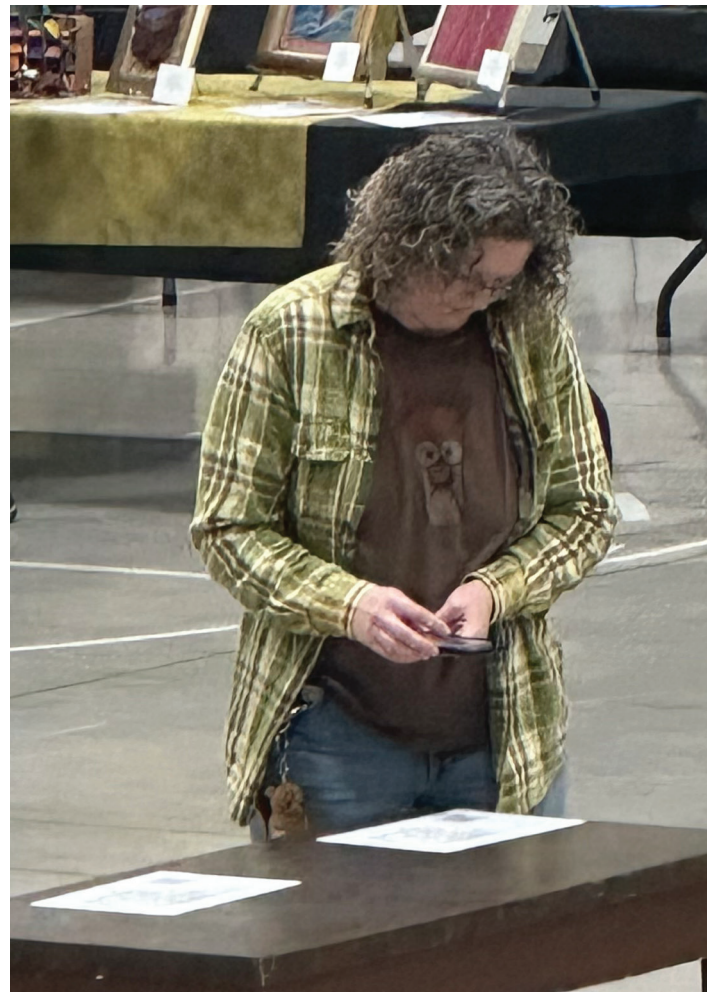
The high school band performed, "Chesford Portrait," "Jersey Boys (Highlights)" and "The Incredibles." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



The high school choir sang, "Bonse Aba," "Riversong," "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel," and "Requiem." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Emily Clark earned the John Philip Sousa band award at the high school spring concert held Thursday. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Aynissa Poor scans the QR Code to get her program at the high school spring concert. It is a new way for the school to go "green" as fewer programs need to be printed. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Guthmiller takes second at Roncalli Golf Meet

Carly Guthmiller took second place at the Aberdeen Roncalli Golf invitational held Thursday in Aberdeen. She was just two strokes behind Roncalli's Claire Crawford. Guthmiller shot an 84 on the day.

Carlee Johnson placed ninth with a 100, Mia Crank was 12th with a 101, Carly Gilbert was 20th with a 108 and Halle Harder was 23rd with a 113.

Roncalli won the team title with 360 points while Groton Area was second with 393, Mobridge-Pollock was third with 413 followed by Milbank with 446 and Redfield with 533.

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Service Notice: Richard Anderson

Funeral services for Richard Anderson, 88, of Claremont will be Tuesday, May 14th at the Presbyterian Church in Groton. Rev. Terry Kenny will officiate. Burial will follow in Union Cemetery, Groton under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Visitation will be held at the funeral chapel on Monday, May 13th from 5-7 p.m. with a prayer service at 7:00 p.m.

Richard passed away April 30, 2024 at Bethesda Home of Aberdeen.



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Rounds Mobile Office Hours

South Dakotans,

We wanted to let you know about upcoming mobile office hours happening this month in your communities. A member of Senator Rounds' team will be present to discuss your concerns or answer any questions you may have. We can also assist you with contacting a federal agency, such as the VA, the IRS, IHS or USDA.

Please check dates and times below for mobile office hours happening near you.

BRITTON

Wednesday, May 8
from 9:00 AM to 10:00 AM CT
at Cups
722 Main Street

ARMOUR

Friday, May 24
from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM CT
at Armour City Hall
620 Main Street

WEBSTER

Wednesday, May 8
from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM CT
at Brewhouse Boutique
700 Main Street

STICKNEY

Friday, May 24
from 12:30 PM to 1:30 PM CT
at Stickney Community Building
104 North 3rd Street

GETTYSBURG

Wednesday, May 15
from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM CT
at 212 Mini Mall/Coffee Bean
301 North Main Street

In addition, you're always welcome to call or stop by one of our offices in Aberdeen, Pierre, Rapid City, Sioux Falls or Washington. Please visit our website to find our office locations and phone numbers.

REDFIELD

Thursday, May 16
from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM CT
at Simply Charming
623 North Main Street

We hope to see you in one of these communities this month.

DE SMET

Tuesday, May 21
from 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM CT
at De Smet Mercantile & Coffeehouse
213 Calumet Avenue SE

HURON

Tuesday, May 21
from 1:30 PM to 2:30 PM CT
at Huron Public Library
521 Dakota Avenue S

Names released in Stanley County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: US Highway 14, mile marker 225, two miles west of Fort Pierre, SD

When: 3:38 p.m., Friday, April 12, 2024

Driver 1: Kellie Sipes, 53-year-old female from Mora, MN, serious non-life-threatening injuries

Vehicle 1: 2010 Dodge Ram

Seat Belt Use: No

Driver 2: Lawrence Woodward, 81-year-old male from Dupree, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 2: 2018 Chevrolet Silverado

Seat Belt Use: No

Stanley County, S.D.- A Dupree, S.D. man has been identified as the man who died as a result of injuries sustained in a two-vehicle crash on the afternoon of Friday April 12, two miles west of Fort Pierre, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2018 Chevrolet Silverado was traveling on US Highway 14 and crossed over into the oncoming lane. The driver of a 2010 Dodge Ram was in the oncoming lane and tried to swerve around to avoid the Silverado, but was unable to do so, resulting in a head on collision, on the passenger side of each truck. Both drivers sustained injuries and were transported by Pierre AMR ambulance to St. Mary Hospital in Pierre for treatment.

The driver of the Ram, Kellie Sipes, age 53, sustained serious non-life-threatening injuries. She was not wearing a seatbelt.

On Saturday April 27, the driver of the Silverado, Lawrence Woodward, age 81, died as a result of his injuries.

He was not wearing a seatbelt.

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

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

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Names Released in Pennington County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: Upper Spring Creek Road & Arena Drive, four miles south of Rapid City, SD

When: 5:03 p.m., Saturday, April 27, 2024

Driver 1: Joshua Mackenzie Garner, 18-year-old male from Rapids City, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2023 Kawasaki ER400DPFNN

Helmet Use: Yes

Driver 2: Albert Neill Fisher, 89-year-old male from Rapid City, no injuries

Vehicle 2: 2022 Honda Ridgeline

Seat Belt Use: Yes

Pennington County, S.D.- An 18-year-old man died Saturday evening in a two-vehicle crash four miles south of Rapids City, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Joshua M. Garner, the driver of a 2023 Kawasaki motorcycle was traveling eastbound on Upper Spring Creek Road. The driver of a 2022 Honda Ridgeline, Albert N. Fisher, was traveling westbound on the same road and began making a left turn onto Arena Drive when the oncoming motorcycle struck the rear passenger side of the pick-up. Garner was transported to a nearby hospital where he later died from his injuries. Fisher had no injuries.

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

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



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Company behind proposed Lake Preston jet fuel plant buoyed by federal carbon credit ruling

Gevo says 2024 carbon intensity model a nod to value of 'climate smart' agriculture

BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 2, 2024 6:32 PM

The company that aims to place a massive jet fuel plant in Lake Preston told investors Thursday that updated guidance from the federal government on biofuel carbon credits could be a boon to its prospects of success.

Englewood, Colorado-based Gevo wants to build a plant to turn ethanol into sustainable aviation fuel in South Dakota, with a project cost of \$1 billion or more. President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act included billions of dollars to encourage the production of such fuel, which currently represents a miniscule slice of the overall aviation fuel market.

Gov. Kristi Noem, whose son-in-law is a registered lobbyist for Gevo, has called the company's Net Zero-1 plant "the largest economic development project in South Dakota history."

Critics in South Dakota have questioned if Net Zero-1 will ever come to fruition, citing Gevo's sub-\$1 stock price and its reliance on federal subsidies.

During Thursday's fourth-quarter earnings call, CEO Patrick Gruber and other company executives talked up multiple pathways to profitability, some of which are untethered to its Lake Preston aspirations.

Gevo currently operates a renewable natural gas plant in northwest Iowa, for example. It also has software called Verity to track the carbon footprint of farm fields, which Gruber says will be valuable to any industry that values carbon reductions.

The company ended the first quarter with cash, cash equivalents and restricted cash of \$340.6 million. Updated guidance on how the federal government will calculate the carbon scores of biofuel feedstocks, which offers points for low-carbon corn or soybeans, are a positive development, Gruber said.

"We've got money. I don't like our stock price at all, but by God we're making progress," Gruber said.

Moving parts, uncertainties

Several dominoes must fall in Gevo's direction for the NZ-1 plant – its largest project – to become a permanent fixture in rural Kingsbury County.

The project's economics are linked to Gevo's ability to offset high production costs with carbon credits from the federal government. The Biden bill's incentives for sustainable aviation fuel are part of a series of policies that hope to reduce the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, as the gas contributes to climate change.

Gevo is in the process of securing a \$950 million federal loan guarantee from the U.S. Department of Energy to stake its claim in a lower-carbon future. To secure the loan, Gevo needs to prove that NZ-1's fuel will hit the carbon reduction mark – specifically, by producing biofuels that reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50% compared to traditional fuel.

To do that, Gruber and other company representatives have repeatedly said Net Zero-1 can't pencil out to profit in South Dakota without access to a carbon capture pipeline from Summit Carbon Solutions. Linking to the pipeline would reduce the Gevo fuel's carbon score, thereby boosting its market value.

That \$8 billion pipeline remains unbuilt and mired in controversy. Like Gevo, it would take advantage of federal tax credits, in its case cashing in by capturing carbon dioxide gas from 57 Midwestern ethanol

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plants and pumping it to a sequestration site in North Dakota.

The Summit project has sparked blowback and lawsuits from landowners – one of which landed in front of the South Dakota Supreme Court and awaits a ruling – and a host of legislative proposals. A “landowner bill of rights” passed in the waning hours of the 2024 legislative session was sold as a compromise between the company and its detractors, but some Summit opponents nonetheless hope to challenge it by way of a ballot initiative this fall.

On Thursday, Gevo Chief Operating Officer Chris Ryan reiterated the importance of the carbon pipeline. Hooking into the pipeline would help Gevo reduce its carbon intensity score and, by extension, the market value of its products to airlines that aim to reduce their own carbon footprints.

“We want to see the CO2 pipeline in South Dakota move forward, to keep Lake Preston as our most attractive site for producing sustainable aviation fuel,” Ryan said. “But we’ve developed a slate of potential sites that we’ve prequalified for future Net Zero projects.”

Eric Frey, Gevo’s vice president of finance, declined to disclose those locations in an email after the earnings call.

Lake Preston is attractive for reasons beyond a pipeline, though. Ryan mentioned its proximity to rail transport, and its relative proximity to airports in Chicago and Minneapolis.

“Both of those airports are in states with a sustainable aviation fuel tax credit of \$1.50 a gallon,” Ryan said.

Many Lake Preston-area farmers already use “climate smart” agriculture practices like no-till planting or the use of certain kinds of fertilizer, he said.

The company had initially planned to spend up to \$175 million on the fuel plant project this year. On the earnings call, Ryan said that figure has dropped to between \$90 million and \$125 million, largely as a result of holding off on certain construction costs until the federal loan guarantee is secured.

CEO: Carbon model bodes well

Summit’s future is uncertain, but another piece of Gevo’s economic puzzle is closer to solid, Gruber said Thursday.

The CEO heralded a final decision from the U.S. Treasury Department on a carbon score calculation model from Argonne National Laboratories called Greenhouse Gases, Regulated Emissions, and Energy Use in Technologies (GREET).

The Biden infrastructure package directed the Department of Energy to use a different model for calculating the emission reductions of sustainable aviation fuel at first. Agriculture groups in the U.S., however, pilloried that initial model as Eurocentric and unable to account for climate-friendly farming practices in the U.S.

The Energy Department announced its intention to use GREET last fall in response, but the agency also ruled that the model needed an update for use as a standard for sustainable aviation fuel. It offers credits for “bundling” ag practices like no-till and cover cropping.

That updated model earned its final approval Monday for use in what are called 40B tax credits, which expire in 2024. The following year, the credits will transition to what the infrastructure law called 45Z credits.

The acceptance of the GREET model for the first round of aviation fuel credits bodes well for its prospects next year, Gruber told investors Thursday.

“It recognizes the many carbon reductions we’ve been talking about,” Gruber said. “It’s moving properly towards the recognition of climate-smart ag.”

Some farm groups have expressed concerns about the updated GREET model, with the president of the American Soybean Association arguing that cover cropping isn’t realistic in all parts of the country.

Gruber gave a nod to concerns about “bundling” practices on the earnings call, but still called the updated guidance a step in the right direction. Gevo’s hope is to see the model be updated again to recognize what he called “field-level” carbon tracking – through the company’s Verity platform – that would negate the need for bundling by measuring carbon emissions directly for each climate smart practice employed on the farm.

Paul Bloom, Gevo's chief carbon officer, told investors that Verity, through which some farmers in Lake Preston are already collecting payments, will help farmers prove the low-carbon worth of their crops.

"We want farmers to be rewarded for reducing their carbon footprint and helping foster rural economic development with agriculture done right," Bloom said.

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

COMMENTARY

Noem's dog killing was bad, but to really understand her, consider the goat

SETH TUPPER

Since Gov. Kristi Noem's disclosure of her farmyard killing spree, everybody's been focused on Cricket. That's understandable. Cricket was a 14-month-old dog. It's easy to imagine her head jutting out of a pickup window, hair and tongue blowing in the wind. Like many dogs, Cricket probably had a personality and other human-like qualities that we so often attribute to canine companions.

Noem shot and killed Cricket on some undisclosed date years ago for being bad at pheasant hunting and good at chicken hunting. The moral, Noem wrote, is that leaders deal with problems immediately. That makes her a "doer," she claimed, not an "avoider."

That's pure bunk, as millions of people have pointed out in an avalanche of criticism since The Guardian obtained an early copy and revealed some of the contents of Noem's ironically named memoir, "No Going Back." The relevant pages have since been shared with South Dakota Searchlight, which requested an advance copy but was ignored; the book's official publication date is next Tuesday.

Again, the focus on Cricket makes sense, because we can all see that Noem could've taken the dog to a shelter and given it another chance at life.

But if you'll hear me out, I want to tell you why Cricket's fate is the wrong place to focus your attention. If you really want to understand Kristi Noem, you need to consider the goat.

'I spotted our billy goat'

After Noem made the death march to her farm's gravel pit, where she shot Cricket, she was apparently still in an uncontrollable rage.

"Walking back up to the yard, I spotted our billy goat," Noem wrote.

The nameless goat's only sin in that moment was being in Noem's field of view.

In the book, Noem tried to justify her snap decision to kill the goat by writing that it "loved to chase" her children and would "knock them down and butt them," leaving them "terrified." The animal also had a "wretched smell."

But apparently none of that had been a big enough problem to do anything about it. Not until Noem got angry enough to kill a dog and decided she needed to kill again.

Noem says she "dragged" the goat to the gravel pit, "tied him to a post," and shot at him. But the goat jumped when she shot.

"My shot was off and I needed one more shell to finish the job," she wrote.

She studiously avoided saying she wounded the goat with the first shot, but that's the implication.

"Not wanting him to suffer," she added — apparently experiencing her first twinge of feeling, after saying that killing the dog was not "pleasant" — "I hustled back across the pasture to the pickup, grabbed another shell, hurried back to the gravel pit, and put him down."

The goat story not only reflects a disturbing lack of self-control, but also raises a question of law.

The crime of animal cruelty

Noem has defended her shooting of the dog, citing legal justification for her actions. She's likely referencing a state law that exempts from the definition of animal cruelty "any reasonable action taken by a person for the destruction or control of an animal known to be dangerous, a threat, or injurious to life, limb, or property."

Cricket killed a neighbor's chickens and "whipped around to bite" Noem when she intervened; therefore, by Noem's logic, her killing of Cricket was legally defensible. She's probably right, legally speaking.

But what about the goat?

Sure, it chased children, butted them, and smelled bad. "So, a goat," Stephen Colbert deadpanned during his Monday monologue on "The Late Show," speaking for everybody who's ever been around goats. If those traits meet the legal definition of "dangerous, a threat, or injurious to life, limb, or property," killing any goat would always be legally justified.

In reality, what Noem did to the goat — dragging it to a gravel pit, tying it to a post, shooting at it once, leaving to get another shell, and shooting it again — sounds an awful lot like the legal definition of animal cruelty. That definition in South Dakota law is "to intentionally, willfully, and maliciously inflict gross physical abuse on an animal that causes prolonged pain, that causes serious physical injury, or that results in the death of the animal."

Alas, cruelty to animals is a Class 6 felony, and lower-class felonies like that carry a seven-year statute of limitations in South Dakota. We don't know exactly what year it was when Noem shot her dog and goat. She gave a clue in the book when she wrote that her children came home on the school bus the day of the killings and one of them asked, "Where's Cricket?" Noem didn't say how she responded, and all of her children are now grown.

If that was more than seven years ago, the goat killing is probably not prosecutable. But no prosecution could do more damage to Noem's reputation and career than she's already done to herself by writing about her animal bloodthirst.

As Noem wrapped up her bloody tale in the book, she wrote that being a leader is often "messy" and "ugly."

In her case, it certainly is.

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

South Dakota Housing launches homebuying assistance program for recent grads

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MAY 2, 2024 4:26 PM

South Dakota Housing will launch its Grants for Grads program Friday, aiming to help college and technical-college graduates purchase their first home in South Dakota. The program is available "for a limited time."

The program existed under former Gov. Dennis Daugaard's administration in an effort to attract workers to the state, but ended in 2019, South Dakota Housing Director of Homeownership Programs Brent Adney told board members on Thursday.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we had quite a few commitments right away," Adney said.

The timing is good, added Director of South Dakota Housing Chas Olson, and it'll help first-time homebuyers enter the market.

Average first-time homebuyers can expect to spend about two-fifths of their pre-tax income on a monthly payment for a house in South Dakota, according to Dakota Institute research.

"Any kind of affordability relief we could provide is good at this time," Olson told board members.

The program will also help with South Dakota's workforce development initiatives, added Housing Development Authority Board President Scott Erickson.

"If someone graduated three years ago, moved to a major city and found that housing is really expensive, it would be the draw to bring them back," Erickson said.

First-time homebuyers will be eligible if they've earned a degree from an accredited university or technical college in the last five years, select a South Dakota home costing \$385,000 or less, and meet income requirements. According to Zillow, the median home sale price in South Dakota is \$290,833.

Materials from the prior iteration of Grants for Grads said the program provided 5% percent of a participant's loan amount as a grant to be used for a down payment or closing cost assistance.

Interested participants must contact a lender to set an appointment and apply for the program.

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

Noem meets with Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry's cabinet in Baton Rouge

BY: PIPER HUTCHINSON - MAY 2, 2024 3:58 PM

BATON ROUGE, Louisiana — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, who's in the midst of a controversy over admitting to killing her dog and goat, was in Louisiana to meet with Gov. Jeff Landry's cabinet Thursday at the state Capitol, multiple attendees at the meeting confirmed to the Louisiana Illuminator.

Noem has been in consideration to be former President Donald Trump's running mate in this fall's election, but some have questioned her status since her recent revelation that she shot and killed her dog Cricket and a billy goat. She spoke to Landry's cabinet about lessons she has learned during her time as governor, according to sources inside the meeting.

Cricket's untimely end, which Noem details in her new book, did not come up in the meeting, attendees said.

Landry was not in attendance at the meeting, which was just the second cabinet meeting held this term. Kate Kelly, a spokesperson for Landry, did not respond to requests for comment for this story.

Noem is a close personal friend of Landry's. She has been among the participants in his annual alligator hunt fundraiser, an event that has also drawn Donald Trump Jr. and other national conservative figures.

Landry and Noem share other political connections as well.

Landry spent thousands to receive political advice from Corey Lewandowski, a former Trump adviser, for his governor's campaign. Lewandowski and Noem are close and have been subjected to allegations that they're having an affair, although a spokesperson for Noem has denied the allegation.

Landry's secretary for the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Madison Sheahan, also worked "directly and indirectly" for Noem and was executive director of the Republican Party in South Dakota.

Noem is slated to make an appearance this weekend at a Palm Beach event with Trump Sr. and other potential vice presidential picks, Politico reports.

Piper Hutchinson is a reporter for the Louisiana Illuminator. She has covered the Legislature and state government extensively for the LSU Manship News Service and The Reveille, where she was named editor in chief for summer 2022.

Biden backs peaceful protest, denounces campus 'chaos' over Gaza

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MAY 2, 2024 12:14 PM

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden responded Thursday to weeks of protest on college campuses calling for a ceasefire in Gaza with a brief statement that the right to protest should be protected, but "not the right to cause chaos."

"We are not an authoritarian nation where we silence people or squash dissent," Biden said from the White House's Roosevelt Room. "In fact, peaceful protest is in the best tradition of how Americans respond to consequential issues. But neither are we a lawless country."

Biden said that the student-led protests have not made him reconsider policy in the Middle East and that

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he did not believe the National Guard should be authorized in response to protests across the country.

He criticized the protests that have led to classes being canceled.

"Dissent is essential to democracy, but dissent must never lead to disorder or to deny the rights of others so students can finish a semester or finish their college education," Biden said. "Order must prevail."

Students have set up encampments to protest the Israel-Hamas war at about 30 college campuses across the country, including Tulane University in Louisiana and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Some have turned violent.

Fights broke out Tuesday night at UCLA when counter-protesters attempted to dismantle an encampment set up by protesters on the university's campus, according to NPR.

"Violent protest is not protected," Biden said. "Peaceful protest is."

Student protesters have called for a ceasefire and for their institutions to divest from businesses that are tied to Israel, including companies that make weapons that have been used in the war.

More than 34,000 Palestinians have died in nearly seven months of war, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

Universities have called in police to sweep the encampments, leading to about 1,300 arrests, according to The Guardian.

Calls from Congress

Lawmakers have also called on higher education institutions to quell the protests, and have raised concerns about antisemitism.

The House on Wednesday passed a bipartisan bill that would require the Department of Education to use the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism.

Republicans and some Democratic advocates of the bill have argued that the protests are a form of antisemitism.

Critics of the bill say it could chill freedom of speech at educational institutions.

Nationwide protests began at Columbia University in New York on April 17 after the university's president, Minouche Shafik, testified before the House Education and Workforce committee about antisemitism on college campuses.

Students pitched tents to establish a "Gaza Solidarity Encampment." A day later Shafik authorized the New York Police Department to sweep the area. NYPD officers arrested 108 students – the largest mass arrest on Columbia's campus since 1968, according to the independent student newspaper the Columbia Spectator.

After that sweep, students returned and stayed for two weeks until Tuesday, when hundreds of NYPD officers entered Columbia's campus and cleared the encampments and Hamilton Hall, which students occupied, according to the Columbia Spectator.

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

'A stark warning': Latest carbon dioxide leak raises concerns about safety, regulation

BY: TRISTAN BAURICK, VERITE NEWS - MAY 2, 2024 6:00 AM

LOUISIANA — It wasn't the wail of a siren or the buzz of an emergency phone alert that warned Tanya Richard a pipeline near her home was spewing poison gas. The first hint that something was wrong came from her cats, a motley collection of free-roaming felines that fled her property as the dense cloud of carbon dioxide (CO2) rolled over a rural stretch of southwest Louisiana on April 3.

"Normally, I've got six kitty cats out here wanting to be fed when I come home," said Richard, who lives just outside Sulphur, a small Calcasieu Parish town about five miles from Lake Charles. "But they were

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nowhere to be found. Then I started to notice no cars were passing by. I said, 'Tanya, something strange is going on.'"

As it turned out, a 2-foot diameter pipeline at a CO2 pump station about a half mile from Richard's house had ruptured, releasing about 107,000 gallons of the gas, which can cause drowsiness, suffocation and sometimes death. Colorless, odorless, and heavier than air, carbon dioxide can travel undetected and at lethal concentrations over large distances.

The CO2 pipeline network is undergoing rapid expansion as companies invest in the booming carbon capture and sequestration market. With this growth come worries that emergency communities may not be prepared or even aware of the potential for dangerous leaks.

In the outskirts of Sulphur, local police and firefighters could do little more than set up roadblocks and wait for the pipeline's owner, ExxonMobil subsidiary Denbury Inc., to send repair specialists.

Calcasieu Parish issued a shelter-in-place advisory, urging everyone within a quarter mile of the pump station to close doors and windows and turn off air conditioners, but officials relied mostly on social media to convey the warning. The parish narrowed its emergency alert system to phone numbers listed for addresses within a quarter mile of the station. That amounted to about eight homes – four of which were likely unoccupied, according to parish officials.

The pump station and pipeline aren't equipped with alarms or other methods of alerting the nearby residents when leaks or other accidents occur.

Several residents in the Sulphur say they received no notice of the leak or became aware of it via Facebook posts more than an hour after the gas began to spread.

"There should have been alarms, and the whole community should have been notified," said Roishetta Ozane, a community organizer who lives three miles from the station. "I don't trust the system we have at all."

Growing pipelines

The pipeline, acquired by Exxon when it purchased Denbury last year, is part of a 925-mile network stretching through Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi. Across the U.S., more than 5,000 miles of pipeline, including the section running near Sulphur, are primarily used for enhanced oil recovery – a process that injects pressurized carbon dioxide into old or declining oil reservoirs to squeeze out leftover deposits.

Much of the current and predicted growth in the CO2 pipeline network is linked to burgeoning carbon capture technologies, which allow industrial plants to store CO2 underground instead of releasing it into the air. The Biden administration has made carbon capture a key component of its efforts to lower emissions. Billions of dollars in federal grants and tax incentives are up for grabs, spurring a host of projects along the Gulf Coast and a vast expansion of the CO2 pipeline network.

Carbon dioxide pipelines could top 65,000 miles – a thirteenfold increase – by 2050, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Safety regulations aren't keeping pace, said Kenneth Clarkson, communications director of the Pipeline Safety Trust. The leak near Sulphur is only the latest mishap in an accident-prone network with weak warning and emergency response systems, he said.

"This recent unacceptable leak from another piece of Denbury infrastructure highlights the immediate need for robust and comprehensive carbon dioxide pipeline safety regulations," Clarkson said. "This incident could have been much worse."

'A stark warning'

Local firefighters alerted Exxon about the April 3 leak shortly after it was first reported at around 6 p.m. The company's Texas-based repair crew arrived an hour and a half later. Wearing masks and air tanks, the crew stopped the leak just before 8:30 p.m. – nearly two and a half hours after it was first reported, according to records from the Ward Six Fire Protection District in Calcasieu Parish. The shelter-in-place advisory was lifted at 9:15 p.m.

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No injuries or serious illnesses were reported, parish officials said.

Exxon is still investigating the leak's cause. In a statement, the company promised to "learn from this."

"We apologize for any disruption this may have caused," an Exxon spokesperson said. "In response to any incident, our priority is to help maintain the safety of the community, our personnel, and the environment, and we thank all first responders for their assistance during this event."

The pipeline has had several accidental releases, including a 1,000-gallon CO2 leak at the same location in 2011, according to the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA).

In 2020, the pipeline had two large-scale leaks in the small Mississippi community of Satartia, about 30 miles from Jackson. One rupture, caused by a mudslide after a hard rain, forced about 200 Satartia residents to evacuate and hospitalized at least 45 people. Emergency responders found people passed out or disoriented and struggling to breathe.

"They found me, my cousin and my brother unconscious, with foam coming out our mouths," said DeEmeris Burns, who was fishing with family members near the Satartia leak when the CO2 cloud reached them. "They thought we were dead."

James Hiatt, a Calcasieu environmental activist, worries about a worse incident in Sulphur or elsewhere along the pipeline, which runs through several parishes.

"These repeated incidents serve as a stark warning," he said. "It's crucial that these risks (aren't) ignored or minimized."

'There should be alarms for this'

Despite being outside the shelter-in-place radius, Richard suffered headaches and drowsiness – both of which are symptoms of mild CO2 exposure.

"That night, I got a massive headache, like a migraine," she said. "Then I felt extremely sleepy, like I'd taken a sleeping pill. I could not get up. I felt...not right."

Many animals can detect CO2 at lower concentrations than people, which may explain why Richard's cats ran off. Lab experiments that tested CO2 as a way to euthanize animals showed "innate avoidance" of CO2 at concentrations of less than 1%, according to scientists at the University of California, Berkeley. Humans can't smell the gas until it tops 30%.

Richard said she shouldn't have to rely on her cats to warn her when a pipeline ruptures.

"There should be alarms for this," she said. "I got very upset that most of us had to learn about this on Facebook. Some of the older people around here aren't on the Internet."

Social media was awash with misinformation about the leak. Residents initially advised each other that the road closure was related to a traffic accident. When it became clear a pipeline had burst, a few commenters downplayed the danger, saying the gas was harmless or that photos of the leak showed a visible, pale vapor, while CO2 is invisible. But because CO2 pipelines are pressurized, a rapid gas release can produce a water vapor cloud that can travel separately from the carbon dioxide, according to the American Petroleum Institute.

"It seemed like nobody knew what was going on until after it was supposedly over," said Cindy Robinson, who lives a mile and a half from the leak. "We're just not prepared for this kind of accident."

Carbon hub

Already heavily industrialized, Louisiana's southwest corner has dozens of chemical plants, oil and gas facilities, and a dense network of pipelines. The region is also poised to become a hub for carbon capture and sequestration projects. The Lake Charles area boasts both a dense concentration of carbon-producing facilities and proximity to porous underground rock formations that can store vast quantities of carbon. Companies plan to build many more pipelines connecting the facilities to sequestration sites.

Ozane, the Sulphur community organizer, said PHMSA and other regulators shouldn't permit additional CO2 pipelines until better safeguards are in place.

"How are they going to manage more pipelines if they can't safely manage the pipelines they have al-

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ready?" she asked.

The federal government has no specific standards for transporting CO2. The rules governing the carbon dioxide pipeline network haven't undergone significant review since 1991, according to the Pipeline Safety Trust.

Federal regulators are considering new CO2 pipeline safety rules that could require leak detection technology and stronger pipeline materials. Details on the proposed rules haven't yet been released to the public. The process has been repeatedly pushed back, and it's unclear when the rules might be approved.

Even if new rules are slow-coming, Richard said she's now far more cognizant of the risks in her community. She frequently passed the pipeline in her car but always assumed it was transporting oil – a substance that's easier to see, smell and contain during a leak.

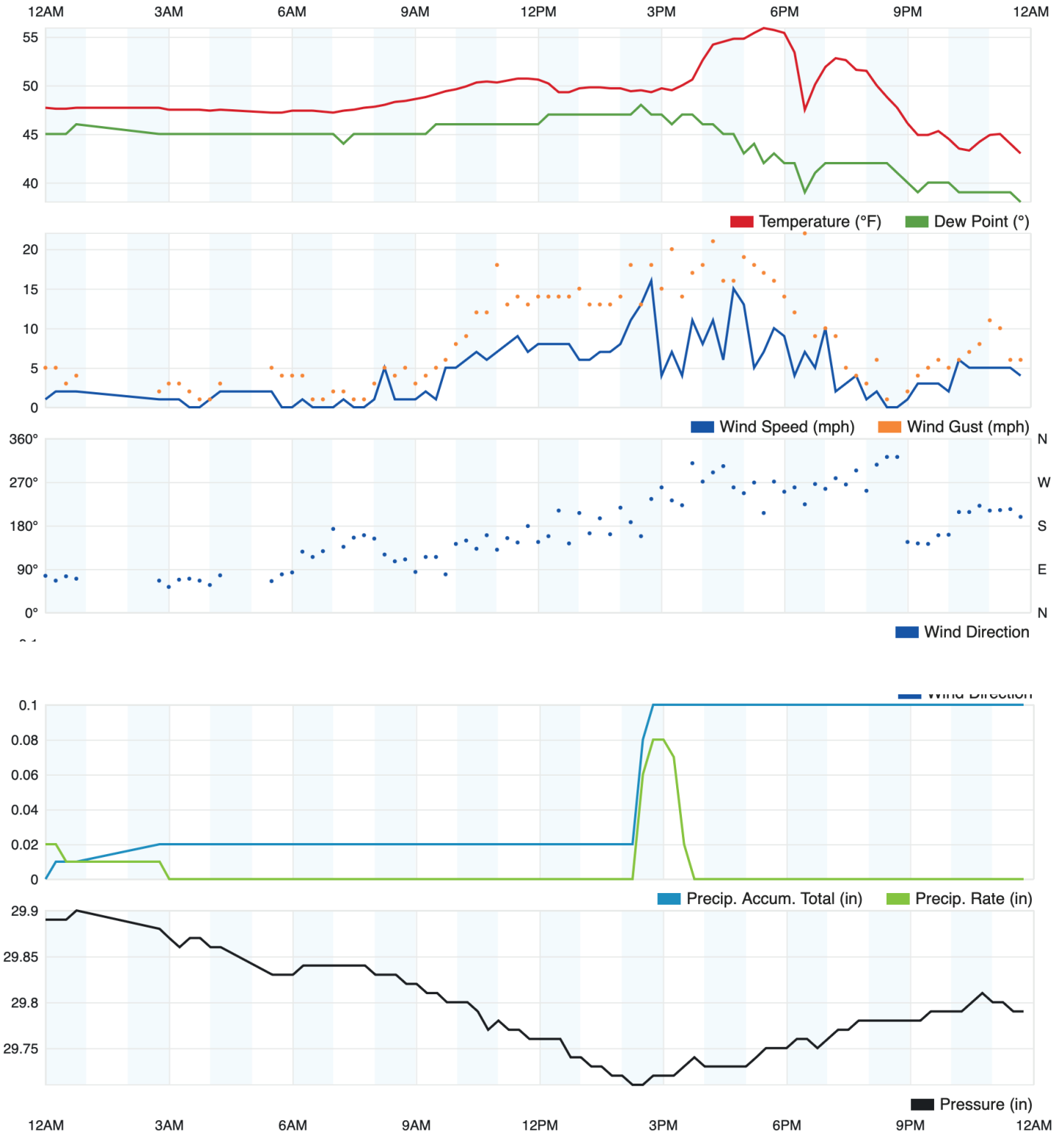
"Pipelines are just all around us, but I had no clue some of them had this gas, and that concerns me," she said. "But I'm aware now. That's for sure."

Tristan Baurick is a senior reporter for Verite News focusing on climate change and the environment.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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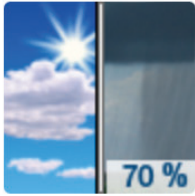
Today

Tonight

Saturday

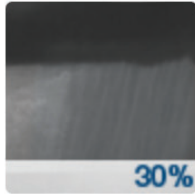
Saturday Night

Sunday



High: 55 °F

Sunny then
Showers
Likely



Low: 35 °F

Chance
Showers



High: 60 °F

Sunny



Low: 35 °F

Mostly Clear



High: 68 °F

Sunny

Weather Outlook

Friday



50s

Saturday



near 60°

Another low pressure system crossing the area on Friday will bring a 30 to 60% chance of rainfall to south central and eastern South Dakota.

The weather pattern is drier and warmer for the weekend!



NWS Aberdeen, SD

Another low pressure system crossing the area on Friday will bring a 30 to 60% chance of rainfall to south central and eastern South Dakota. The weather pattern is drier and warmer for the weekend! Highs Sunday will be near 70 degrees.

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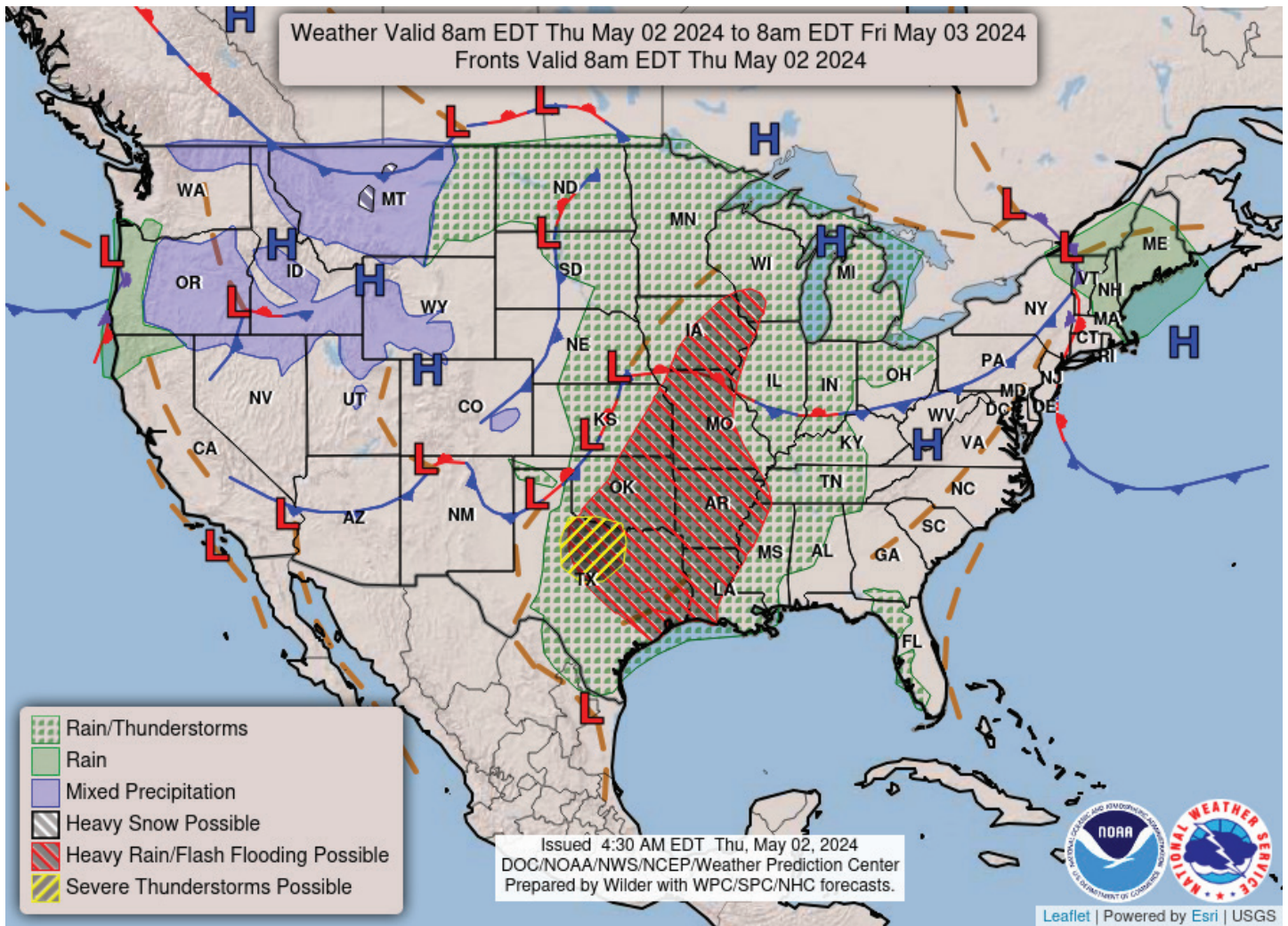
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 56 °F at 5:27 PM
Low Temp: 43 °F at 10:20 PM
Wind: 30 mph at 6:20 PM
Precip: : 0.10

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1952
Record Low: 13 in 2005
Average High: 65
Average Low: 39
Average Precip in May.: 0.33
Precip to date in May: 0.16
Average Precip to date: 4.30
Precip Year to Date: 4.69
Sunset Tonight: 8:43:41 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:13:16 am

Day length: 14 hours, 28 minutes



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Today in Weather History

May 3, 1895: A tornado moved northeast from 3 miles northwest of Redfield through Ashton. It was estimated to be on the ground for about 5 miles. Several homes were unroofed and barns destroyed. Tornadoes were spotted in Minnehaha and Bon Homme Counties in South Dakota.

May 3, 1907: The low temperature at Watertown fell to 16 degrees, making this coldest May temperature ever recorded Watertown.

May 3, 1960: Late season snowfall of 3 to 7 inches covered Perkins, Corson, and Campbell Counties. Lemmon reported 7 inches, and 6 miles SE of McIntosh had 6.5 inches. Main roads were very slippery and some rural roads impassable for about one day.

May 3, 1999: Two to four inches of rain fell across southeastern Dewey County causing flash flooding south of La Plant, mainly on Willow Creek. As a result of the flash flooding, several roads were underwater. Highway 212 south of La Plant was flooded for a few hours along with Highway 8, 15 miles south of La Plant. The flash flooding resulted in some road and bridge damage.

May 3, 2002: With low humidity, dry vegetation, and increasing South winds, embers from a day old controlled burn initiated a large grassland fire in the early afternoon hours west of Claremont. South winds of 30 to 40 mph gusting to 50 mph caused the fire to spread quickly. The fire extended to 4 miles wide and spread 4 miles north before it was contained late in the evening. Many trees along with a mobile home, an abandoned house, and an old barn burned. Seven miles of road had to be closed due to poor visibility from smoke. Eleven fire departments with nearly 150 firefighters extinguished the fire. The fire was completely put out during the afternoon hours of the 4th. This fire was one of the largest grassland fires in Brown County history.

1761: Large tornadoes swept through the harbor at Charleston, South Carolina when a British fleet of 40 sails was at anchor. The tornadoes raised a wave 12 feet high, leaving many vessels on their beam ends. Four people drowned.

1868: A tornado traveled 15 miles across Warren and Knox Counties, northwest of Galesburg, Illinois. The small town of Ionia, in Warren County, was destroyed. 16 homes and two churches in the city were leveled, along with 30 homes elsewhere. The tornado killed six people and injured 40 others. Many of the casualties occurred during a church service when the church roof was torn off and dropped onto the congregation.

1895: In Sioux County, Iowa an exceptionally violent tornado, at times 1,000 yards wide packing winds estimated at over 250 mph moved from three miles north of Ireton to two miles southwest of Hull hitting four schools. Two school houses several miles apart were leveled, killing teachers and students. Sibling teachers were killed at two different schools. Adjoining farms were also destroyed with several deaths in homes.

1999: There were 63 tornadoes in Oklahoma, making this the worst outbreak ever to strike the state. In Central Oklahoma alone, eight individual supercell thunderstorms produced 57 tornadoes. Bridge Creek, Moore and southern parts of the Oklahoma City Metro area were hit the hardest. When it was near Moore, Oklahoma, a truck-mounted Doppler radar measured a wind speed of 318 mph, the highest ever observed in a tornado. Forecasters at the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, OK were faced with the unprecedented situation of a major tornado on the ground threatening their location. As a major F5 tornado was approaching the Oklahoma City metro area from the southwest, the SPC notified its backup, the Air Force Weather Agency at Offutt AFB in Omaha, Nebraska that they might have to assume operational responsibility if the tornado approached Norman. The storm remained several miles west of the facility but was visible from the SPC roof. Damage from this single tornado was around one billion dollars, making it the most costly tornado in history. Estimated damage from the entire tornado outbreak was \$1.485 billion, making this the most expensive tornado outbreak ever. 2,314 homes were destroyed, and another 7,428 were damaged. To the north in Kansas, an F4 tornado tracked 24 miles through Sumner and Sedgwick Counties, killing 6, injuring 154, and causing \$146 million in damages. Haysville and Wichita suffered severe damage. A total of 8,480 buildings and homes were damaged or destroyed with, 109 destroyed.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

ATTITUDES MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

His lifelong ambition was to become the CEO of the successful business his father founded. He dreamed about the day he would have a corner office overlooking the skyline of New York with a secretary to bring him coffee each morning.

Then reality set in. The day before he was to begin his career his father said, "Son, you'll start at the bottom just as I did. Your first job will be to water the hundreds of plants in our building."

His hopes dashed, and his dreams shattered, he refused to become discouraged. The next morning, he came to work with his new business card that read: "Plant Manager."

We cannot always control our circumstances, but we can control our attitude. Whatever happens in our lives happens because God has something special for us to do in that particular situation. This does not mean that what happens to us is good. Rather, it means that God is able to turn every circumstance of our lives into something that will eventually be good for us. We must remember that God is not working to make us happy. He is working in us to complete the work that began in our lives when we received Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. His goal is to fashion and form us into the likeness of His Son so that we will be enabled and equipped to fulfill the purpose He has for us.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to refuse to be disturbed or destroyed by the disappointments of life. May we accept and believe that all things work together for our good. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. Romans 8:28



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.30.24

10 18 27 37 61 5

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$284,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 40 Mins 50
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.01.24

14 19 24 26 40 7

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,150,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 55
DRAW: Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.02.24

7 14 16 37 41 17

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 17 Hrs 10 Mins 50
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.01.24

3 13 14 22 24

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$80,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 10
DRAW: Mins 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.01.24

6 15 19 42 45 16

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 39
DRAW: Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.01.24

1 11 19 21 68 15

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$203,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 39
DRAW: Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Which states could have abortion on the ballot in 2024?

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

South Dakota advocates submitted petitions Wednesday in their effort to amend the state constitution to include the right to abortion, at least under some circumstances.

Signatures are also expected to be turned in Friday in Missouri for a ballot measure there.

The efforts in both states are part of a movement to put abortion rights questions to voters since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and removed the nationwide right to abortion.

Since that 2022 decision, most Republican-controlled states have new abortion restrictions in effect, including 14 that ban it at every stage of pregnancy. Most Democrat-dominated states have laws or executive orders to protect access.

Additionally, voters in seven states — California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, Ohio and Vermont — have sided with abortion rights supporters on ballot measures.

It's not clear yet how many states will vote on measures to enshrine abortion access in November. In some, the question is whether amendment supporters can get enough valid signatures. In others, it's up to the legislature. And there's legal wrangling in the process in some states.

Some of the efforts have already failed to reach ballots. Wisconsin's legislative session ended without a state Senate vote on a measure that the House approved to ask voters to ban abortion after 14 weeks. Iowa lawmakers did not approve a measure before their session ended this year to ask voters to find that there's no constitutional right to abortion; Pennsylvania lawmakers previously pursued a similar amendment, but it's not expected to be added to the ballot there this year. A Louisiana measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution died in committee and one in Maine effectively died when it fell short of receiving the approval of two-thirds of the House.

WHAT'S SECURELY ON 2024 BALLOTS?

FLORIDA

The state Supreme Court ruled on April 1 that a ballot measure to legalize abortion until viability could go on the ballot despite a legal challenge from state Attorney General Ashley Moody, who argued that there are differing views on the meaning of "viability" and that some key terms in the proposed measure are not properly defined.

Advocates collected nearly a million signatures to put a state constitutional amendment to legalize abortion until viability on the ballot, surpassing the nearly 892,000 required.

Sixty percent of voters would have to agree for it to take effect.

Abortion is illegal in Florida after the first six weeks of pregnancy under a law that took effect May 1.

MARYLAND

Maryland voters this year will also be asked whether to enshrine the right for women to end their pregnancies in the state's constitution in a ballot question put before them by lawmakers last year. The state already protects the right to abortion under state law and Democrats outnumber Republicans 2-1. Abortion is allowed in Maryland until viability.

NEW YORK

New York lawmakers agreed to ask voters to bar discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, pregnancy outcome and reproductive healthcare as part of a broader equal protection amendment. It would also bar discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin and disability. The language of the constitutional amendment does not mention abortion specifically. Abortion is allowed in New York law until viability.

WHERE ELSE COULD ABORTION BE ON THE BALLOT IN 2024?

ARIZONA

A signature drive is underway to add a constitutional right to abortion in Arizona. Under the measure,

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the state would not be able to ban abortion until the fetus is viable, with later abortions allowed to protect a woman's physical or mental health. Supporters must gather nearly 384,000 valid signatures by July 4.

Abortion is currently legal for the first 15 weeks of pregnancy in Arizona. An Arizona Supreme Court ruling in April said enforcement could begin soon for a near-total ban that was already on the books. But on Thursday, the governor signed a bill repealing that law, which is still expected to be in effect for a time.

ARKANSAS

Proponents of an amendment to allow abortion in many cases have until July 5 to gather nearly 91,000 valid signatures to get it on the Nov. 5 ballot. The measure would bar laws banning abortion in the first 20 weeks of gestation and allow abortion later in pregnancy in cases of rape, incest, threats to the woman's health or life, or if the fetus would be unlikely to survive birth. Because it allows limits as soon as 20 weeks, the proposal does not have the support of Planned Parenthood Great Plains, which includes Arkansas. The state has a ban on abortion at all stages of pregnancy with narrow exceptions.

COLORADO

Advocates for a ballot measure to add constitutional protections for abortion, including requiring Medicaid and private health insurers to cover it, have turned in signatures to have it placed on the ballot. The secretary of state's office has until May 17 to determine whether there are enough valid signatures. More than 124,000 are required.

Amending the state constitution requires support of 55% of voters.

Those backing a dueling measure — a law to ban abortion — did not turn in signatures, and the measure will not go before voters.

Abortion is legal at all stages of pregnancy in Colorado.

MISSOURI

Missouri advocates for abortion access are expected to turn in signatures on Friday, two days ahead of their deadline to submit more than 171,000 to ask voters to approve a constitutional amendment to guarantee abortion until viability.

A group of moderate Republicans have abandoned for this year efforts for an alternate amendment that would have allowed abortion up to 12 weeks and after that with only limited exceptions.

Abortion is currently banned in Missouri at all stages of pregnancy with limited exceptions.

MONTANA

Abortion rights proponents in Montana have proposed a constitutional amendment that would bar the government from denying the right to abortion before viability or when it's necessary to protect the life or health of the pregnant person. After a legal battle over the ballot language, the Montana Supreme Court on April 1 wrote its version of the language that would appear on the ballot if supporters gather more than 60,000 signatures by June 21. Abortion is legal until viability in Montana under a 1999 Montana Supreme Court opinion.

NEBRASKA

Advocates are trying to collect about 125,000 signatures needed by July 5 to put a constitutional amendment before voters to protect abortion rights until fetal viability. A competing petition effort would add a constitutional amendment that mirrors a law adopted last year that bans abortion after 12 weeks, with some exceptions.

NEVADA

Signatures are being gathered to place an abortion access amendment on Nevada's ballot in November. Under the amendment, abortion access for the first 24 weeks of pregnancy or later to protect the health of the pregnant person, which is already assured under a 1990 law, would be enshrined in the constitution. It requires more than 102,000 valid signatures by June 26 to place the measure on the ballot. Voters would need to approve it in both 2024 and 2026 to change the constitution.

The measure is one of several attempts by Nevada abortion rights groups to get a ballot question before voters in 2024 or 2026.

SOUTH DAKOTA

South Dakota advocates said they submitted more than 55,000 signatures — 20,000 more than required

— to get a measure on the ballot that would loosen restrictions but does not go as far as many abortion rights advocates would like. It would ban any restrictions on abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy. It would allow the state in the second trimester to “regulate the pregnant woman’s abortion decision and its effectuation only in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman.” An abortion ban would be allowed in the third trimester, as long as it included exceptions for the life and health of the woman. Planned Parenthood is not supporting the measure.

Abortion in the state is now banned at all stages of pregnancy with narrow exceptions.

Abortion is still consuming US politics and courts 2 years after a Supreme Court draft was leaked

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Two years after a leaked draft of a U.S. Supreme Court opinion signaled that the nation’s abortion landscape was about to shift dramatically, the issue is still consuming the nation’s courts, legislatures and political campaigns — and changing the course of lives.

On Wednesday, a ban on abortion after the first six weeks of pregnancy, often before women realize they’re pregnant, took effect in Florida, echoing laws in two other states. In Arizona, meanwhile, lawmakers voted to repeal a total ban on abortion dating back to 1864, decades before Arizona became a state — and the governor signed it a day later. Also this week, the Kansas Legislature increased funding for anti-abortion centers, while advocates in South Dakota submitted the required number of signatures for a ballot measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution.

The status of abortion in states across the country has changed constantly, with lawmakers passing measures and courts ruling on challenges to them. Currently, 14 states are enforcing bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with limited exceptions. Most Democratic-led states, meanwhile, have taken steps to preserve or expand access.

“Some of it’s exactly what we knew would happen,” said David Cohen, a professor at the Thomas R. Kline School of Law at Drexel University who studies abortion policy, “and others have been big surprises that have put, frankly, the anti-abortion movement on their heels.”

Although more than 20 states have begun enforcing abortion bans of varying degrees since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022, studies have found that the number of monthly abortions nationally is about the same — or higher — than it was before the ruling. Asked to weigh in on the emotional debate, voters have supported the position favored by abortion rights advocates on all seven statewide ballot measures since then.

The Supreme Court’s decision in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* case was released officially on June 24, 2022, upending nearly 50 years of abortion being legal nationwide. But the world caught a glimpse of it about six weeks earlier, on May 2, after a news outlet published a leaked draft.

“With the *Dobbs* decision, the will of the people is now able to be adhered to,” said Stephen Billy, vice president of state affairs for Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America. He said abortion rights supporters have sought to create uncertainty about laws he says are clear — especially with assertions that the bans bar abortion in medical emergencies: “They’ve tried to sow political division just to advance their policy agenda,” he said.

At the time Politico published the leaked draft, Amanda Zurawski was undergoing fertility treatment and was about two weeks away from learning she was finally pregnant.

The Austin, Texas, woman had always supported abortion rights, and was mad that the right to abortion was on the verge of disappearing. But she didn’t expect a direct impact in her life.

That changed months later when she was denied an abortion despite a premature rupture of membranes, which can lead to dangerous internal bleeding. Days later, she was diagnosed with sepsis, a life-threatening reaction to infection. Her daughter, Willow, was ultimately aborted, but Zurawski nearly died in the process because of the delay.

She emerged from the experience an activist.

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"I thought I would be a new mom with a newborn," she said in an interview. "Instead, I was in Tallahassee, Florida, meeting the vice president."

Zurawski has been a plaintiff in a court challenge seeking to clarify Texas abortion law and has spoken about her experience before Congress and across the country. She recently left her tech job to spend the next several months supporting abortion rights and President Joe Biden's reelection campaign.

"I'm definitely somebody who wants to fight for justice," she said. "This is not the path that I would have guessed."

Zurawski's widely publicized experience is a reflection of the central role abortion has assumed on the political stage during this highly charged election year.

In Arizona, one of a handful of battleground states that will decide the next president, the state Supreme Court issued a ruling last month saying that a near-total abortion ban passed in 1864 could be enforced now that Roe v. Wade had been overturned. That decision ultimately led to the repeal proposal that passed the state House last week and the Senate on Wednesday after vitriolic debate. Gov. Katie Hobbs, a Democrat, signed the repeal on Thursday. The 1864 law is still expected to be in effect for a time, though.

Florida, Maryland and New York will have measures on the ballot in November to protect abortion access.

"Women are going to be put into an impossible situation of not having access to health care, whether it is in an emergency situation or just family planning," said Nikki Fried, chair of the Florida Democratic Party. "Floridians are going to have the opportunity to take control back."

Susan B. Anthony's Billy said his group was focused on defeating the ballot questions in Florida and other states where passing them would roll back bans in place now.

Arizona is one of at least eight states with a push for a similar measure. A few states also have pushes for measures to enshrine bans in the state constitution.

The issue is also weighing heavily in the presidential election.

President Joe Biden has been blasting his likely opponent, former President Donald Trump, for appointing the Supreme Court justices who swayed the Roe v. Wade decision. Vice President Kamala Harris traveled to Florida on Wednesday to decry the six-week ban passed in the nation's third most-populous state.

Trump, who said in April that he believes abortion laws should be decided by states, went further this week, telling Time magazine that states should also be able to prosecute women who seek abortions. Proposals to do that have not picked up steam in any state legislatures so far.

The Latest | A hostage held in Gaza dies as Israel and Hamas work on a cease-fire deal

By The Associated Press undefined

Dror Or, a 49-year-old held captive in Gaza, has died, the Hostages Families Forum said Friday. Or marks the 38th hostage killed, the forum said.

He was one of about 250 people abducted when Hamas attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians. Israel says militants still hold around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

Dozens of people demonstrated Thursday night outside Israel's military headquarters in Tel Aviv, demanding a deal to release the hostages. Meanwhile, Hamas said it would send a delegation to Cairo as soon as possible to keep working on cease-fire talks. A leaked truce proposal hints at compromises by both sides after months of talks languishing in a stalemate.

Across the United States, tent encampments and demonstrations against the Israel-Hamas war have spread across university campuses. More than 2,000 protesters have been arrested over the past two weeks as students rally against the war's death toll and call for universities to separate themselves from any companies that are advancing Israel's military efforts in Gaza.

The Israel-Hamas war has driven around 80% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million from their homes, caused vast destruction in several towns and cities, and pushed northern Gaza to the brink of famine. The death toll in Gaza has soared to more than 34,500 people, according to local health officials, and the

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territory's entire population has been driven into a humanitarian catastrophe.

Currently:

— Hamas is sending a delegation to Egypt for further cease-fire talks in the latest sign of progress. What's on the table for Israel and Hamas in the latest cease-fire talks?

— Colombia breaks diplomatic ties with Israel, but its military relies on key Israeli-built equipment.

— Turkey halts all trade with Israel over military actions in Gaza.

— Nearly 2,200 people have been arrested during pro-Palestinian protests on U.S. college campuses.

— The unprecedented destruction of housing in Gaza hasn't been seen since World War II, the United Nations says.

Follow AP's coverage of the war at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

Here's the latest:

ISRAELI STRIKE ON RAFAH KILLS 7, INCLUDING CHILDREN

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — An Israeli strike on the city of Rafah on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip killed seven people, including children, hospital officials said Friday.

The overnight strike on the Chahine family home killed two adults and five kids whose ages ranged between 7 and 16, according to a list of the names released by Abu Youssef al-Najjar Hospital.

The strike came a day after the militant Palestinian group Hamas said it was sending a delegation to Egypt for further cease-fire talks — a new sign of progress in attempts by international mediators to hammer out an agreement between Israel and the militant group to end the war in Gaza.

Israel has regularly carried out airstrikes on Rafah since the start of the war seven months ago and has threatened to send in ground troops, saying Rafah is the last major Hamas stronghold in the coastal enclave. Over 1 million Palestinians have sought refuge in the city on the Egyptian border. The United States and others have urged Israel not to invade, fearing a humanitarian catastrophe.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu pledged Tuesday to launch an incursion into Rafah.

HOSTAGE IN GAZA HAS DIED, HOSTAGES FAMILIES FORUM SAYS

TEL AVIV — Dror Or, a 49-year-old held captive in Gaza, has died, the Hostages Families Forum said Friday. Or marks the 38th hostage killed, the forum said.

He and two of his children were abducted from Kibbutz Be'eri when Hamas attacked on Oct. 7 and his wife, Yonat, was killed. His children, 17-year-old Noam and 13-year-old Alma, were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November.

Israel says Hamas is holding about 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

Israel and Hamas appear to be seriously negotiating an end to the war in Gaza and the return of Israeli hostages. A leaked truce proposal hints at compromises by both sides after months of talks languishing in a stalemate. Hamas said Thursday that it was sending a delegation to Egypt for further cease-fire talks, in a new sign of progress.

Some families worry that Israel's war aims of eliminating Hamas and launching an incursion into Gaza's southern city of Rafah will derail negotiations. Dozens of people demonstrated Thursday night outside Israel's military headquarters in Tel Aviv, demanding a deal to release the hostages.

US DEFENSE SECRETARY SAYS 'CONDITIONS ARE NOT FAVORABLE' FOR AN ISRAELI OPERATION IN RAFAH

HONOLULU — United States Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, while at a news conference Thursday in Hawaii, was asked by a reporter what consequences Israel would face from the U.S. if Israel conducted an offensive operation in Rafah without "appropriately taking into account" civilians in the area.

Austin said it would be up to President Joe Biden and he wouldn't speculate on that, but that currently, "conditions are not favorable to any kind of operation."

"What we've highlighted for the Israelis is that it's really important to make sure that the civilians that are in that battle space move out of that battle space before any activity is conducted. And that if and when they return to any kind of operation that it be conducted in a more much more precise fashion," Austin said.

He noted there were about 275,000 people living in and around Rafah before the conflict started but

there are now about 1.4 million.

"That's a lot of people in a very small space. There's a good chance that without taking the right measures that we'll see a lot more civilian casualties going forward. So before anything happens, we certainly want to see them address that threat to the civilians," Austin said.

"Right now, the conditions are not favorable to any kind of operation. And we've been clear about that. It is necessary to take care of the civilian population that's in that area before anything else happens," he said.

Damaged in war, a vibrant church in Ukraine rises as a symbol of the country's faith and culture

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LYPIVKA, Ukraine (AP) — This Orthodox Easter season, an extraordinary new church is bringing spiritual comfort to war-weary residents of the Ukrainian village of Lypivka. Two years ago, it also provided physical refuge from the horrors outside.

Almost 100 residents sheltered in a basement chapel at the Church of the Intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary while Russian troops occupied the village in March 2022 as they closed in on Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, 40 miles (60 kilometers) to the east.

"The fighting was right here," the Rev. Hennadii Kharkivskyi said. He pointed to the churchyard, where a memorial stone commemorates six Ukrainian soldiers killed in the battle for Lypivka.

"They were injured and then the Russians came and shot each one, finished them off," he said.

The two-week Russian occupation left the village shattered and the church itself — a modern replacement for an older structure — damaged while still under construction. It's one of 129 war-damaged Ukrainian religious sites recorded by UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural organization.

"It's solid concrete," the priest said. "But it was pierced easily" by Russian shells, which blasted holes in the church and left a wall inside pockmarked with shrapnel scars. At the bottom of the basement staircase, a black scorch mark shows where a grenade was lobbed down.

But within weeks, workers were starting to repair the damage and work to finish the solid building topped by red domes that towers over the village, with its scarred and damaged buildings, blooming fruit trees and fields that the Russians left littered with land mines.

For many of those involved — including a tenacious priest, a wealthy philanthropist, a famous artist and a team of craftspeople — rebuilding this church plays a part in Ukraine's struggle for culture, identity and its very existence. The building, a striking fusion of the ancient and the modern, reflects a country determined to express its soul even in wartime.

The building's austere exterior masks a blaze of color inside. The vibrant red, blue, orange and gold panels decorating walls and ceiling are the work of Anatoliy Kryvolap, an artist whose bold, modernist images of saints and angels make this church unique in Ukraine.

The 77-year-old Kryvolap, whose abstract paintings sell for tens of thousands of dollars at auction, said that he wanted to eschew the severe-looking icons he'd seen in many Orthodox churches.

"It seems to me that going to church to meet God should be a celebration," he said.

There has been a church on this site for more than 300 years. An earlier building was destroyed by shelling during World War II. The small wooden church that replaced it was put to more workaday uses in Soviet times, when religion was suppressed.

Kharkivskyi reopened the parish in 1992 following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and set about rebuilding the church, spiritually and physically, with funding from Bohdan Batrukh, a Ukrainian film producer and distributor.

Work stopped when Russian troops launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022. Moscow's forces reached the fringes of Kyiv before being driven back. Lypivka was liberated by the start of April.

Since then, fighting has been concentrated in the east and south of Ukraine, though aerial attacks with rockets, missiles and drones are a constant threat across the country.

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By May 2022, workers had resumed work on the church. It has been slow going. Millions of Ukrainians fled the country when war erupted, including builders and craftspeople. Hundreds of thousands of others have joined the military.

Inside the church, a tower of wooden scaffolding climbs up to the dome, where a red and gold image of Christ raises a hand in blessing

For now, services take place in the smaller basement, where the priest, in white and gold robes, recently conducted a service for a couple of dozen parishioners as the smell of incense wafted through the candlelit room.

He is expecting a large crowd for Easter, which falls on Sunday. Eastern Orthodox Christians usually celebrate Easter later than Catholic and Protestant churches, because they use a different method of calculating the date for the holy day that marks Christ's resurrection.

A majority of Ukrainians identify as Orthodox Christians, though the church is divided. Many belong to the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine, with which the Lypivka church is affiliated. The rival Ukrainian Orthodox Church was loyal to the patriarch in Moscow until splitting from Russia after the 2022 invasion and is viewed with suspicion by many Ukrainians.

Kharkivskiy says the size of his congregation has remained stable even though the population of the village has shrunk dramatically since the war began. In tough times, he says, people turn to religion.

"Like people say: 'Air raid alert — go see God,'" the priest said wryly.

Liudmyla Havryliuk, who has a summer home in Lypivka, found herself drawn back to the village and its church even before the fighting stopped. When Russia invaded, she drove to Poland with her daughters, then 16 and 18 years old. But within weeks she came back to the village she loves, still besieged by the Russians.

The family hunkered down in their home, cooking on firewood, drawing water from a well, sometimes under Russian fire. Havryliuk said that when they saw Russian helicopters, they held hands and prayed.

"Not prayer in strict order, like in the book," she said. "It was from my heart, from my soul, about what should we do? How can I save myself and especially my daughters?"

She goes to Lypivka's church regularly, saying it's a "place you can shelter mentally, within yourself."

As Ukraine marks its third Easter at war, the church is nearing completion. Only a few of Kryvolap's interior panels remain to be installed. He said that the shell holes will be left unrepaired as a reminder to future generations.

"(It's) so that they will know what kind of 'brothers' we have, that these are just fascists," he said, referring to the Russians.

"We are Orthodox, just like them, but destroying churches is something inhumane."

Maui sues cell carriers over wildfire warning alerts that were never received during service outages

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Had emergency responders known about widespread cellphone outages during the height of last summer's deadly Maui wildfires, they would have used other methods to warn about the disaster, county officials said in a lawsuit.

Alerts the county sent to cellphones warning people to immediately evacuate were never received, unbeknownst to the county, the lawsuit said.

Maui officials failed to activate sirens that would have warned the entire population of the approaching flames. That has raised questions about whether everything was done to alert the public in a state that possesses an elaborate emergency warning system for a variety of dangers including wars, volcanoes, hurricanes and wildfires.

Major cellular carriers were negligent in failing to properly inform Maui police of widespread service outages, county officials said in the lawsuit filed Wednesday in state court against Verizon Wireless, T-Mobile USA, Spectrum Mobile and AT&T.

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"We continue to stand with the Maui community as it heals from the tragic fires, but these claims are baseless," T-Mobile said in a statement Thursday. "T-Mobile broadcasted wireless emergency alerts to customers while sites remained operational, promptly sent required outage notifications, and quickly contacted state and local emergency agencies and services."

A Spectrum representative declined to comment, and the other carriers didn't immediately respond to an email from The Associated Press seeking comment.

A flood of lawsuits has come out since the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century ripped through the historic town of Lahaina and killed 101 people.

Maui County is a defendant in multiple lawsuits over its emergency response during the fires. The county is also suing the Hawaiian Electric Company, saying the utility negligently failed to shut off power despite exceptionally high winds and dry conditions.

In Maui's latest legal action, lawyers for the county say if the county is found liable for damages, then the cell carriers' "conduct substantially contributed to the damages" against the county.

"On August 8 and August 9, 2023, while the County's courageous first responders battled fires across the island and worked to provide first aid and evacuate individuals to safety, the County notified those in the vicinity of danger through numerous alerts and warnings, including through direct text messaging to individual cell phones," the lawsuit said.

The county sent at least 14 alert messages to cellphones, warning residents to evacuate, the lawsuit said. The county later discovered all 21 cell towers serving West Maui, including in Lahaina, experienced total failure.

"As of the date of this filing, the Cell Carriers still have not reported to the County the true extent and reach of the cell service outages on August 8 and August 9, 2023, as they are mandated to do under federal law," the lawsuit said. "Had the Cell Carriers accurately reported to the County the complete and widespread failure of dozens of cell sites across the island as they were mandated to do by law, the County would have utilized different methods in its disaster and warning response."

Sanctions and a hobbled economy pull the rug out from under Iran's traditional carpet weavers

By MEHDI FATTAHI Associated Press

KASHAN, Iran (AP) — The historic Kashan bazaar in central Iran once sat on a major caravan route, its silk carpets known the world over. But for the weavers trying to sell their rugs under its ancient arches, their world has only unraveled since the collapse of Iran's nuclear deal with world powers and wider tensions with the West.

Rug exports, which exceeded \$2 billion two decades ago, have plummeted to less than \$50 million in the last year in the Persian calendar that ended in March, according to government customs figures. With fewer tourists coming and difficulties rising in making international transactions, Iranian rugs are going unsold as some weavers work for as little as \$4 a day.

"Americans were some of our best customers," said Ali Faez, the owner of one dusty carpet shop at the bazaar. "Rugs are a luxury product and they were eager to buy it and they used to make very good purchases. Unfortunately this has been cut — and the connection between the two countries for visitors to come and go has gone away."

Kashan's rug-weaving industry has been inscribed in UNESCO's list of the world's "intangible cultural heritage." Many of the weavers are women, with the skills needed for the Farsi weaving style passed down from generation to generation, using materials like vine leaves and the skins of pomegranate fruit and walnuts to make the dyes for their threads. A single rug can take months to make.

For decades, Western tourists and others would pass through Iran, picking up rugs as gifts and to take back home. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the U.S. increased sanctions on Iran's theocratic government over the American Embassy siege, Tehran's links to militant attacks and other issues.

But in 2000, the outgoing administration of former President Bill Clinton lifted a ban on the import of

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Iranian caviar, rugs and pistachios.

"Iran lives in a dangerous neighborhood," then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said at the time. "We welcome efforts to make it less dangerous."

By 2010, with concerns rising over Iran's nuclear program, the U.S. again banned Iranian-made Persian rugs. But in 2015, Iran struck a nuclear deal with world powers which greatly reduced and drastically lowered the purity of Tehran's stockpile of enriched uranium. The rug trade was allowed once again.

Three years later, in 2018, then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from the nuclear deal. Since then, Iran began enriching uranium at near-weapons-grade levels and has been blamed for a series of attacks at sea and on land, including an unprecedented drone-and-missile attack targeting Israel last month.

For the carpet weavers, that's meant their wares were once again banned under U.S. law.

"It started when Trump signed that paper," Faez told The Associated Press, referring to the renewed sanctions. "He ruined everything."

Abdullah Bahrami, the head of a national syndicate for handwoven rug producers, also blamed the collapse of the industry on the Trump sanctions. He put the value of exports to the U.S. as high as \$80 million annually prior to the sanctions.

"The whole world used to know Iran by its rugs," Bahrami told the state-run IRNA news agency in March.

Making things worse is what carpet sellers see as a drop in tourists to Kashan as well. High-value American and European tourism in Iran has largely stopped, the daily Shargh newspaper warned last year. Ezzatollah Zarghami, Iran's minister of tourism, insisted in April that 6 million tourists visited the country over the last 12 months, though that likely includes religious pilgrims as well as Afghans and Iraqis with less spending money.

But even those tourists that do show up face the challenge of Iran's financial system, where no major international credit card works.

"I had a Chinese customer the other week. He was struggling to somehow make the payment because he loved the rug and didn't want to let go of it," Faez said. "We have to pay a lot of commission to those who can transfer money and have bank accounts abroad. Sometimes they cancel their orders because they don't have enough cash with them."

The collapse of the rial currency has left many Iranians also unable to purchase the handwoven rugs. Wages in the industry are low, leading to a growing number of Afghan migrants working in workshops around Kashan as well.

Designer Javad Amorzesh, one of just a few of Kashan's old-school artists, said his orders have fallen from 10 a year to just two. He has fired staff and now works alone in a cramped space.

"Inflation rose every hour. People were hit repeatedly by inflation," he said. "I used to have four to five assistants in a big workshop."

Offering a bitter laugh alone in his workshop, he added, "We've been left isolated."

UK's governing Conservatives suffer big losses in local elections as Labour appears headed for power

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain's governing Conservative Party is suffering heavy losses as an array of election results pour in Friday, piling pressure on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak ahead of a U.K. general election in which the main opposition Labour Party appears increasingly likely to return to power after 14 years.

Labour won control of councils in England it hasn't held for decades and was successful in a special by-election for Parliament that, if repeated in a general election in coming months, would lead to one of the Conservatives' biggest-ever defeats.

The only negative for Labour has been in some areas with large Muslim populations, such as Oldham in northwest England, where the party's candidates appear to have suffered as a result of leader Keir

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Starmer 's strongly pro-Israel stance in the conflict in Gaza.

Perhaps most important in the context of the looming general election, which has to take place by January but could come as soon as next month, Labour easily won back Blackpool South in the northwest of England that went Conservative in the last general election in 2019, when then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson won a big victory. In the contest, triggered by the resignation of a Conservative lawmaker following a lobbying scandal, Labour's Chris Webb secured 10,825 votes, to his second-placed Conservative opponent's 3,218.

Labour leader Starmer went to Blackpool to congratulate Webb on his success and urged Sunak to call a general election.

"This was directly to Rishi Sunak to say we are fed up with your decline, your chaos and your division and we want change," he said.

Thursday's elections in large parts of England were important in themselves, with voters deciding who will run many aspects of their daily lives, such as garbage collection, road maintenance and local crime prevention, in the coming years. But with a general election looming, they will be viewed through a national prism.

The results so far provide more evidence that Labour is likely to form the next government — and by quite a margin — and that Starmer will become prime minister.

As of Friday morning, with barely a quarter of the 2,661 seats up for grabs counted, the Conservatives were down 122 while Labour was up 52. Other parties, such as the centrist Liberal Democrats and the Green Party are also making gains. Reform U.K., which is trying to usurp the Conservatives from the right, can also point to a successful set of election results, even though it contested a minority of council seats. The party's threat to the Conservatives was evident in Blackpool South, where it was less than 200 votes from second place.

Labour has won in areas that voted heavily for Britain's departure from the European Union and where it was previously crushed by Johnson, such as Hartlepool in the northeast of England, and Thurrock in southeast England. It also seized control of Rushmoor, a leafy and military-heavy council in the south of England where it has never won.

John Curtice, professor of politics at the University of Strathclyde, said the results so far indicate that the Conservatives are losing around half of the seats they are trying to defend.

"We are probably looking at certainly one of the worst, if not the worst, Conservative performances in local government elections for the last 40 years," he told BBC radio.

The results will roll in through Saturday. Sunak hopes that he can point to successes, notably in several key mayoral races, to douse talk that the Conservative Party will change its leader again before the U.K.'s main election.

Key to his survival could be the results of mayoral elections in Tees Valley in the northeast of England and in the West Midlands. The former is due Friday midday and the latter on Saturday. Should Conservative mayors Ben Houchen and Andy Street hold on, Sunak may win some respite from restive lawmakers in his party. Should both lose, he may face trouble. Labour's Sadiq Khan is expected to remain mayor of London when results are announced on Saturday.

Sunak could preempt any challenge by threatening to call a general election that has to take place before January 2025. He has the power to decide on the date and has indicated that it will be in the second half of 2024.

Sunak became prime minister in October 2022 after the short-lived tenure of his predecessor, Liz Truss, who left office after 49 days following a budget of unfunded tax cuts that roiled financial markets and sent borrowing costs for homeowners surging.

Her chaotic — and traumatic — leadership compounded the Conservatives' difficulties following the circus surrounding her predecessor Johnson, who was forced to quit after being adjudged to have lied to Parliament over lockdown breaches at his offices in Downing Street.

Nothing Sunak has tried to do appears to have shifted the political dial, with Labour consistently 20 percentage points ahead in opinion polls, which would lead, if translated into a general election, to a landslide victory on a par with that achieved by Tony Blair in 1997.

Whether anyone else can do better is a question that may occupy the minds of nervous Conservative lawmakers in Parliament heading into the weekend.

A Chinese flavor of rap music is flourishing as emerging musicians find their voices

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

CHENGDU, China (AP) — In 2018, the censors who oversee Chinese media issued a directive to the nation's entertainment industry: Don't feature artists with tattoos and those who represent hip-hop or any other subculture.

Right after that well-known rapper GAI missed a gig on a popular singing competition despite a successful first appearance. Speculation went wild: Fans worried that this was the end for hip-hop in China. Some media labeled it a ban.

The genre had just experienced a banner year, with a hit competition-format TV show minting new stars and introducing them to a country of 1.4 billion people. Rappers accustomed to operating on little money and performing in small bars became household names. The announcement from censors came at the peak of that frenzy. A silence descended, and for months no rappers appeared on the dozens of variety shows and singing competitions on Chinese TV.

But by the end of that year, everything was back in full swing. "Hip-hop was too popular," says Nathanel Amar, a researcher of Chinese pop culture at the French Centre for Research on Contemporary China. "They couldn't censor the whole genre."

What had looked like the end for Chinese hip-hop was just the beginning.

ROOTS IN THE WESTERN CITY OF CHENGDU

Since then, hip-hop's explosive growth in China has only continued. It has done so by carving out a space for itself while staying clear of the government's red lines, balancing genuine creative expression with something palatable in a country with powerful censors.

Today, musicians say they're looking forward to an arriving golden age.

Much of the energy can be found in Chengdu, a city in China's southwestern Sichuan region. Some of the biggest acts in China today hail from Sichuan; Wang Yitai, Higher Brothers and Vava are just a few of the names that have made Chinese rap mainstream, performing in a mix of Mandarin and Sichuan dialects. While hip-hop in Chengdu started out with the very heavy sounds of trap, its mainstreaming has meant artists have broadened out to lighter sounds, from R&B to the trending afrobeat rhythms popularized by Beyonce.

Although Chinese rap has been operating underground for decades in cities like Beijing, it is the Sichuan region — known internationally for its spicy cuisine, its panda reserve and its status as the birthplace of the late leader Deng Xiaoping — that has come to dominate.

"There's a lot of rhymes in rap. And from a young age, we were exposed to language with a lot of rhymes. And I feel like we're its origin," says Mumu Xiang, who is from Sichuan and attended a rap concert recently held in the city.

The dialect lends itself to rap because it's softer than Mandarin Chinese and there are a lot more rhymes, says 25-year-old rapper Kidway, from a town just outside Chengdu. "Take the word 'gang' in English. In Sichuanese, there's a lot of rhymes for that word 'fang, sang, zhuang,' the rhymes are already there," he says.

Chengdu is also welcoming to outsiders, says Haysen Cheng, a 24-year-old rapper who moved to the city from Hong Kong in 2021 to work on his music at the invitation of Harikiri, a British producer who has helped shape the scene and worked with Chengdu's biggest acts.

Part of the city's hip-hop lore centers around a collective called Chengdu Rap House or CDC, founded by a rapper called Boss X, whose fans affectionately call him "Xie laober" in the Sichuan dialect. The city has embraced rap, as its originators like Boss X went from making music in a run-down apartment in an

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old residential community to performing in a stadium for thousands. At Boss X's performance in March, fans sang along and cheered in Sichuanese. Even with a ban on the audience standing up, standard at all stadium performances in China, the energy was infectious.

"When I came to mainland China, they showed me more love in like three or four months than I ever received in Hong Kong," Cheng says. He got to collaborate with the Higher Brothers, one of the few Chinese rap groups who also have global recognition. "The people here actually want each other to succeed."

The price of going mainstream, though, means the underground scene has evaporated. Chengdu was once known for its underground rap battles. Those no longer happen, as freestyling usually involves profanity and other content the authorities deem unacceptable. The last time there was a rap battle in the city, rappers say, authorities quickly showed up and shut it down. These days it's all digital, with people uploading short clips of their music to Douyin, TikTok's Chinese version, to get noticed.

Kidway says he learned to rap from going to these battles and competing against other rappers his age. He once worked at a renovation company but ditched it to pursue rap full time.

But even though the rap battles are gone, the field has more rappers than ever. That's a good thing. "The more players there are," he says, "the more interesting it is."

A TV SHOW THAT GAVE BIRTH TO A GENRE

Rarely can a single cultural product be said to have originated a whole genre of music. But the talent competition/reality TV show "The Rap of China" has played an outsized role in building China's rap industry.

The first season, broadcast on IQiyi, a web streaming platform, brought rap and hip-hop culture to households across the country. The first season's 12 episodes drew 2.5 billion views online, according to Chinese media reports.

In the first season, the show relied on its judges' star power to draw in an audience — namely Kris Wu, a Chinese Canadian singer and former member of the hit K-pop group EXO. At that point in time, Wu was at the height of his fame, and his comments as a judge that season even became internet memes. "Do you have freestyle?" he asked a contestant, dead serious, on Episode One — a moment that went on to live in internet infamy because people doubted Wu's rap credentials.

Two winners emerged from the first season: GAI and PG One. Shortly after their win, the internet was awash with rumors about the less-than-perfect doings of PG One's personal life. The Communist Youth League also criticized one of his old songs for content that appeared to be about using cocaine, very much violating one of the censor's red lines.

Then came the 2018 meeting where censors reminded TV channels of who could not appear on their programs, namely anyone who represented hip-hop. PG One was finding that any attempts to release new music were quickly taken down by platforms. The platform, IQiyi, even took down the entire first season for a while.

But by late summer 2018, fans were excited to hear that they could expect a second season of "The Rap of China," though there was a rebrand. The name in English stayed the same, but in Chinese it signaled a new direction. The show's name changed from "China Has Hip-Hop" to "China Has 'Shuochang,'" a term that also refers to traditional forms of storytelling.

Regulators had given the go-ahead for hip-hop to continue its growth, but they had to follow the lines set by the government censors. Hip-hop was now shuochang and a symbol of youth culture; it had to stay away from mentions of drugs and sex. Otherwise, though, it could proceed.

"It was a success for the Chinese regulators. ... They really succeeded in coopting the hip-hop artists," Amar says. "It's like a contract: If you want to be popular, if you want to be on TV shows, you have to respect the red line."

FINDING A CHINESE VOICE

With tight censorship on the entertainment industry and a ban on mentions of drugs and sex in lyrics, artists have reacted in two ways. Either they wholeheartedly embrace the displays of patriotism and nationalism, or they avoid the topics.

Some, like GAI, have fully taken on the government's mantle in the mainstreaming of hip-hop. He won "The Rap of China" with a song called "Not Friendly" in which, in classic hip-hop fashion, he dissed other

rappers that he didn't name. "I'm not friendly. I can break your pen at any moment. Tear down your flashy words. ... My enemies you better pray for you to have a good end."

Just a few years later, Gai is singing about China's glorious history on the CCTV's Spring Festival New Year's Gala broadcast, a tightly scripted entertainment show with comedy sketches, songs and dance performances that is watched by families while celebrating Chinese New Year.

"Five thousand years of history flows past like quicksand. I'm proud to be born in Cathay," he sings, wearing a Qing Dynasty-inspired Tang jacket.

The red lines have also pushed artists to be more creative. For Chinese rap to thrive, artists have to find original voices, they say. 32-year-old rapper Fulai describes his own music as chill rap or "bedroom music" — not in the euphemistic sense, but the type of music you listen to as you lay in bed. His upcoming album, he says, is about ordinary things like fights with his wife and washing dishes.

Still, Fulai says he talks about sex a lot in his lyrics. Chinese is a language with countless sayings and a strong poetic tradition: "There's nothing you can't touch," he says. "You just have to be clever about it."

Developing a genuine Chinese brand of rap remains a work in progress. Hip-hop got its start from New York's boroughs of Brooklyn and the Bronx, where rappers made music out of their tough circumstances, from shootouts to crime to illegal drug dealing. In China, the challenge is about finding what fits its context. Shootouts are rare in a country where guns are banned, and the penalties for drug use are high.

The rap crews in Chongqing, another mega-city in the Sichuan region, had a taste of gang culture reflected in their music as artists wrote about fights and vows of brotherhood. But most of today's biggest acts don't rap about topics like knifing someone or drug use anymore.

Wang Yitai, who was a member of Chengdu's rap collective CDC, is now one of the most popular rappers in China. His style has infused mainstream pop sounds.

"We're all trying hard to create songs that not only sound good, but also topics that fit for China," Wang says. "I think hip-hop's spirit will always be about original creation and will always be about your own story."

Arizona governor's signing of abortion law repeal follows political fight by women lawmakers

By ANITA SNOW and MORGAN LEE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs' signing of the repeal of a Civil War-era ban on nearly all abortions was a stirring occasion for the women working to ensure that the 19th century law remains in the past.

Current and former state lawmakers and reproductive rights advocates crowded into the 9th floor rotunda outside Hobbs' office Thursday afternoon, hugging and taking selfies to capture the moment. Some wept.

"It's a historic moment, and it's a place and time where thrilling moments all come together," Democratic Rep. Stephanie Stahl Hamilton said during the signing ceremony. "It's a time where we are doing away with what is in the past that doesn't fit the present."

Stahl and Sen. Anna Hernandez, also a Democrat, were the two current lawmakers chosen to speak at the ceremony for their efforts to ensure repeal of the long-dormant law that bans all abortions except those done to save a patient's life.

The effort won final legislative approval Wednesday in a 16-14 Senate vote, as two GOP lawmakers joined with Democrats during a session of some three hours where motivations for votes were described in personal, emotional and even biblical terms. There were graphic descriptions of abortion procedures and amplified audio of a fetal heartbeat, along with warnings against "legislating religious beliefs."

Abortion-ban advocates in the Senate gallery jeered state Republican state Sen. Shawna Bolick as she explained her vote in favor of repeal, then she was scolded by GOP colleagues. Bolick is married to state Supreme Court Justice Clint Bolick, who voted with the majority in April to reinstate the 1864 law. He faces a retention election in November.

The House previously approved the repeal, with three Republicans in that chamber breaking ranks.

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Hobbs says the move is just the beginning of a fight to protect reproductive health care in Arizona. The repeal is set to take effect 90 days after legislative session ends, which typically is June or July once the budget is approved.

"This means everything to get this archaic, inhumane territorial law off the books," said Dr. Gabrielle Goodrick, founder of Phoenix-based Camelback Family Planning, which performs a third of abortions in Arizona.

A 2022 statute banning the procedure after 15 weeks of pregnancy then will become Arizona's prevailing abortion law.

Abortion rights advocates, led by Planned Parenthood Arizona, have filed a motion with the state Supreme Court to prevent the 1846 law from taking hold before the repeal does. If it's rejected, girls and women could see a pause in abortion services.

The 19th century law had been blocked in Arizona since 1973 with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* that guaranteed the constitutional right to an abortion nationwide. When the federal law was overturned in 2022, it left Arizona's in legal limbo.

The Arizona Supreme Court last month took the state back decades and reinstated the ban that provides no exceptions for survivors of rape or incest. The justices suggested doctors could be prosecuted for violating the law, with a maximum five-year prison sentence if convicted.

The anti-abortion group defending the ban, Alliance Defending Freedom, maintains county prosecutors can begin enforcing it once the Supreme Court's decision becomes final, which hasn't yet occurred. Democratic Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes is making a push to delay the enforcement of the ban until sometime in late July.

Meanwhile, abortion-rights advocates are collecting signatures to enshrine reproductive rights in Arizona's constitution. A proposed ballot measure would allow abortions until a fetus could survive outside the womb, typically around 24 weeks, with exceptions to save the parent's life or to protect her physical or mental health.

Republican lawmakers are considering putting one or more competing abortion proposals before voters in November.

In other parts of the U.S. this week, supporters of a South Dakota abortion rights initiative submitted far more signatures than required to make the ballot this fall, while in Florida a ban took effect against most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, before many people even know they are pregnant.

President Joe Biden's campaign team believes anger over the fall of *Roe v. Wade* will give them a political advantage in battleground states like Arizona, while the issue has divided Republican leaders.

For the Democratic women who led the effort on the repeal in Arizona, Thursday was celebratory moment but also showed there's more work to be done, they said.

In an interview before the signing ceremony, Stahl Hamilton talked about her early years on the Navajo Nation where her parents were school teachers and where federally funded clinics still limit abortion services.

She talked about a sister-in-law who she said struggled with two difficult pregnancies, one that resulted in a stillbirth and a nonviable one in which "they had to make the heartbreaking decision to terminate that pregnancy, because there was no brain development."

"And I imagine that had any of these laws been in place during the time when she was needing care, it really would have wreaked havoc," Stahl Hamilton said.

When the Civil War-era ban was passed, all the 27 lawmakers were men, America was at war over the right to own slaves and women couldn't vote, Hobbs said. Now, the Arizona Legislature is roughly evenly divided between men and women.

Hernandez became involved in politics after her younger brother, Alejandro, was killed in a police shooting in April 2019. She and her two other siblings have tattoos with his portrait on their left arms.

Her sister is a nurse in labor and delivery, and she has two nieces, aged 16 and 12, she said.

"In this moment, I think of them being able to grow up in the state that we love so much, having the

rights that they have," she said.

Former Democratic state Rep. Athena Salman was so overcome with emotion Thursday that she could barely speak when she was called to the lectern at the signing ceremony. She proposed a repeal of the 19th century law in 2019, three years before Roe v. Wade was overturned.

Salman, who resigned in January to lead an abortion rights group, said she can't stop thinking about her daughters.

"Future generations will not have to live under the restrictions and the interference that we have had to experience," she said.

Why did bill to stem 'foreign influence' trigger protests in Georgia over country's media freedom?

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) — Georgia has been engulfed by huge protests triggered by a proposed law that critics see as a threat to media freedom and the country's aspirations to join the European Union.

Here is a look at the bill and the protests it has ignited:

WHAT IS THE NEW BILL?

The bill would require media and nongovernmental organizations and other nonprofits to register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" if they receive more than 20% of funding from abroad.

The legislature approved a second reading of the bill Wednesday, and the third and final reading is expected later this month.

The proposed legislation is nearly identical to the one that the governing Georgian Dream party was pressured to withdraw last year after street protests.

WHAT DO THE BILL'S SUPPORTERS AND OPPONENTS SAY?

The governing party says the bill is necessary to stem what it deems as harmful foreign influence over the country's political scene and to prevent unidentified foreign actors from trying to destabilize the country's political scene.

The opposition denounces the bill as "the Russian law" because Moscow uses similar legislation to stigmatize independent news media and organizations critical of the Kremlin. Opponents of the bill say the fact that it is now before parliament is a sign of Moscow's purported influence over Georgia. They fear it will become an impediment to the country's long-sought prospects of joining the European Union.

Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, who is increasingly at odds with the governing party, has vowed to veto the law, but Georgian Dream has a majority sufficient to override a presidential veto.

WHAT IS THE STATE OF RUSSIA-GEORGIA TIES?

Russia-Georgia relations have been strained and turbulent since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

In August 2008, Russia fought a brief war with Georgia, which had made a botched attempt to regain control over the breakaway province of South Ossetia. Moscow then recognized South Ossetia and another separatist province, Abkhazia, as independent states and beefed up its military presence there. Most of the world considers both breakaway regions to be parts of Georgia, a former Soviet republic.

Tbilisi has ruptured diplomatic ties with Moscow, and the separatist regions' status remains a key irritant, even as Russia-Georgia relations have improved in recent years.

The opposition United National Movement accuses Georgian Dream, which was founded by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a billionaire who made his fortune in Russia, of serving Moscow's interests — an accusation the governing party vehemently denies.

HOW DID THE PROTESTS GO?

For several successive days, thousands of demonstrators besieged the parliament building in a bid to block the bill's passage and scuffled with police.

Police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds. Over 60 protesters have been arrested and several people have been injured. Levan Khabeishvili, chairman of the United National Movement, was among those injured.

On Thursday, parliament canceled its scheduled session, saying the move was because of damage to

the building during Wednesday's protests.

WHAT IS THE EU'S POSITION?

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has described the parliament's move as "a very concerning development" and warned that "final adoption of this legislation would negatively impact Georgia's progress on its EU path."

"This law is not in line with EU core norms and values," Borrell said in a statement last month. "The proposed legislation would limit the capacity of civil society and media organizations to operate freely, could limit freedom of expression and unfairly stigmatize organizations that deliver benefits to the citizens of Georgia."

For decades, Moscow has sought to silence its critics abroad

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

From its earliest days, the Soviet Union's intelligence services — whether known as the Cheka or by the names of any of its successor agencies like the KGB — kept the government in power by pursuing its opponents no matter where they lived.

Intelligence experts say that policy is still followed by Russian President Vladimir Putin, himself a product of the KGB who does not disguise his scorn for perceived traitors, defectors and other political enemies abroad. The Kremlin has routinely denied involvement in such attacks.

The Cheka secret police, founded by Felix Dzerzhinsky, often used assassins to hunt down enemies of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Security expert Andrei Soldatov said the work of the Kremlin's intelligence services, then and now, has been defined by threats from dissidents abroad.

Perhaps the Cheka's most successful undertaking in the 1920s was "Operation Trust," which focused on Russians living abroad who opposed the regime, he said.

The Trust was a front organization, purported to be anti-Bolshevik but in reality was meant to catch and kill Moscow's enemies. It sent representatives to the West to entrap Russian exiles under the pretext of helping the resistance movement.

That's how it caught Sidney Reilly, a Ukrainian-born agent who worked for Britain both inside Russia and abroad. Known as the "Ace of Spies," and said to be the model for Ian Fleming's James Bond, Reilly was lured back to Moscow, where he was reportedly killed in 1925.

A look at other regime opponents who fled abroad, believing that exile would keep them safe:

LEON TROTSKY

Leon Trotsky, a key figure in the Bolshevik Revolution and once seen as a likely successor to Vladimir Lenin as leader of the Soviet Union, lost a battle for power with Josef Stalin and fled the country. He lived in exile in Mexico, where he continued to criticize Stalin. He was befriended there by Ramon Mercader, who pretended to be sympathetic to Trotsky's ideas but in reality was a Soviet agent. In August 1940, the two were alone in Trotsky's study when Mercader struck him with an ice ax, mortally wounding him at age 60.

STEPAN BANDERA

Stepan Bandera was the leader of a Ukrainian nationalist movement in the 1930s and 1940s that included a rebel militia which fought alongside invading Nazi forces in World War II. Bandera's supporters see him as a freedom fighter for Ukraine against Soviet oppression while Kremlin supporters paint him as a Nazi collaborator who massacred Jews. While living in exile in Munich in 1959, Bandera, 50, was killed after being confronted by a Soviet agent with a gun that sprayed cyanide.

GEORGI MARKOV

Bulgarian journalist Georgi Markov defected to the West in 1969 and was a harsh critic of his country's pro-Moscow Communist regime, broadcasting commentaries on the BBC and Radio Free Europe. In September 1978, Markov was waiting at a London bus stop near Waterloo Bridge when a man walked past him and jabbed him with a poison-tipped umbrella. Former KGB agent Oleg Kalugin suggested in 1992 that the attack had been planned by the Soviet Union and Bulgaria, which had asked Moscow for help

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in the assassination. The probe into Markov's death was closed in 2013 and no one was ever convicted.

ALEXANDER LITVINENKO

Alexander Litvinenko, a former KGB officer and a lieutenant colonel in its successor agency, the FSB, defected to Britain, where he was a harsh critic of the Kremlin and Putin. On Nov. 1, 2006, Litvinenko met two men at London's Millennium Hotel and had tea with them. He later fell violently ill, and doctors determined he had ingested polonium-210, a radioactive isotope. He died three weeks later at age 43. On his deathbed, Litvinenko accused Putin of ordering his assassination, and Britain also alleged that the Russian state was involved. The Kremlin denied involvement.

SERGEI AND YULIA SKRIPAL

Sergei Skripal, a former Russian military intelligence officer jailed for spying for Britain, was released in 2010 as part of a swap for Russian agents caught in the U.S., and settled in Salisbury, England. In March 2018, he and his daughter, Yulia, were found slumped on a bench in the city, with traces of the nerve agent Novichok discovered on the front door of their house. The Skripals spent weeks hospitalized in critical condition before recovering. A British woman died after being exposed to the nerve agent, which was found in a discarded perfume bottle. Britain accused Russia in the attack, which the Kremlin denied being behind, and Western nations expelled Russian spies in response. Two Russian men identified by authorities as the attackers denied any involvement, saying they were only tourists.

ZELIMKHAN KHANGOSHVILI

Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, an ethnic Chechen born in Georgia, fought Moscow's forces during a separatist war in the region of southern Russia. After the war, he continued to help Chechen insurgents, and the FSB viewed him as a terrorist. He fled to Germany after surviving two assassination attempts but was shot to death in broad daylight in 2019 in Berlin's Kleiner Tiergarten park by a bicyclist. Vadim Krasikov was convicted in the killing, which German authorities say was ordered by the Kremlin. Putin has indicated he wants Krasikov returned to Russia as part of a prisoner swap. Khangoshvili is one of several ethnic Chechen exiles killed apparently on Moscow's orders. Evidence reviewed by the court alleged that Krasikov had been employed by a Russian security agency, but Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov called allegations of Russian involvement "absolutely groundless."

MAKSIM KUZMINOV

In August 2023, pilot Maxim Kuzminov flew a Russian Mi-8 military helicopter to Ukraine, saying he wanted to defect. At a news conference, Kuzminov said he didn't support the war and that Ukraine had promised him money and protection. In October, a popular Russian TV commentator denounced the defection in a report that featured three masked men in camouflage identified as members of military intelligence who threatened Kuzminov, saying he would not live to go on trial. In February, police found what was later identified as Kuzminov's bullet-riddled body in La Cala, Spain. He had been shot a half-dozen times and run over by a vehicle. The head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergei Naryshkin, said Kuzminov became a "moral corpse" as soon as he started planning "his dirty and terrible crime." Kremlin spokesman Peskov said Feb. 20 that he had no information on the death.

Nearly 2,200 people have been arrested during pro-Palestinian protests on US college campuses

By JULIE WATSON, CHRISTOPHER L. KELLER, CAROLYN THOMPSON and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Police have arrested nearly 2,200 people during pro-Palestinian protests at college campuses across the United States in recent weeks, sometimes using riot gear, tactical vehicles and flash-bang devices to clear tent encampments and occupied buildings. One officer accidentally discharged his gun inside a Columbia University administration building while clearing out protesters camped inside, authorities said.

No one was injured by the officer's mistake late Tuesday inside Hamilton Hall on the Columbia campus, the NYPD said Thursday. He was trying to use the flashlight attached to his gun at the time and instead

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fired a single round that struck a frame on the wall.

There were other officers but no students in the immediate vicinity, officials said. Body camera footage shows when the officer's gun went off, but the district attorney's office is conducting a review, a standard practice.

More than 100 people were taken into custody during the Columbia crackdown, just a fraction of the total arrests stemming from recent campus protests over the Israel-Hamas war. A tally by The Associated Press recorded at least 56 incidents of arrests at 43 different U.S. colleges or universities since April 18. The figures are based on AP reporting and statements from universities and law enforcement agencies.

Early Thursday, officers surged against a crowd of demonstrators at University of California, Los Angeles, ultimately taking at least 200 protesters into custody after hundreds defied orders to leave, some forming human chains as police fired flash-bangs to break up the crowds. Police tore apart a fortified encampment's barricade of plywood, pallets, metal fences and dumpsters, then pulled down canopies and tents.

Like at UCLA, tent encampments of protesters calling on universities to stop doing business with Israel or companies they say support the war in Gaza have spread across other campuses nationwide in a student movement unlike any other this century.

Israel has branded the protests antisemitic, while Israel's critics say it uses those allegations to silence opposition. Although some protesters have been caught on camera making antisemitic remarks or violent threats, protest organizers — some of whom are Jewish — call it a peaceful movement to defend Palestinian rights and protest the war.

President Joe Biden on Thursday defended the right of students to peaceful protest but decried the disorder of recent days.

The demonstrations began at Columbia on April 17 with students calling for an end to the Israel-Hamas war, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the Health Ministry there. Israel launched its offensive in Gaza after Hamas militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, on Oct. 7 and took roughly 250 hostages in an attack on southern Israel.

On April 18, the NYPD cleared Columbia's initial encampment and arrested roughly 100 protesters. The demonstrators set up new tents and defied threats of suspension, and escalated their actions early Tuesday by occupying Hamilton Hall, an administration building that was similarly seized in 1968 by students protesting racism and the Vietnam War.

Roughly 20 hours later, officers stormed the hall. Video showed police with zip ties and riot shields streaming through a second-floor window. Police had said protesters inside presented no substantial resistance.

The officer's gun went off at 9:38 p.m., the NYPD said, about 10 minutes after police started pouring into Hamilton Hall. The department did not name the officer, whose actions were first reported by news outlet The City on Thursday.

The confrontations at UCLA also played out over several days this week. UCLA Chancellor Gene Block told alumni on a call Thursday afternoon that the trouble started after a permitted pro-Israel rally was held on campus Sunday and fights broke out and "live mice" were tossed into the pro-Palestinian encampment later that day.

In the following days, administrators tried to find a peaceful solution with members of the encampment and expected things to remain stable, Block said.

That changed late Tuesday, he said, when counterdemonstrators attacked the pro-Palestinian encampment. Campus administrators and police did not intervene or call for backup for hours. No one was arrested that night, but at least 15 protesters were injured. The delayed response drew criticism from political leaders, including California Gov. Gavin Newsom, and officials pledged an independent review.

By Wednesday, the encampment had become "much more of a bunker" and there was no other solution but to have police dismantle it, Block said.

The hourslong standoff went into Thursday morning as officers warned over loudspeakers that there would be arrests if the crowd — at the time more than 1,000 strong inside the encampment as well as outside of it — did not disperse. Hundreds left voluntarily, while another 200-plus remained and were ultimately taken into custody.

Meanwhile, protest encampments at other schools across the U.S. have been cleared by police — resulting in more arrests — or closed voluntarily. But University of Minnesota officials reached an agreement with protesters not to disrupt commencements, and similar compromises have been made at Northwestern University in suburban Chicago, Rutgers University in New Jersey and Brown University in Rhode Island.

Colombia breaks diplomatic ties with Israel but its military relies on key Israeli-built equipment

By ASTRID SUÁREZ Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Colombia has become the latest Latin American country to announce it will break diplomatic relations with Israel over its military campaign in Gaza, but the repercussions for the South American nation could be broader than for other countries due to longstanding bilateral agreements over security matters.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro on Wednesday described Israel's actions in Gaza as "genocide" and announced his government would end diplomatic relations with Israel effective Thursday. But he did not address how his decision could affect Colombia's military, which uses Israeli-built warplanes and machine guns to fight drug cartels and rebel groups, and a free trade agreement between both countries that went into effect in 2020.

Also in the region, Bolivia and Belize have also severed diplomatic relations with Israel over the Israel-Hamas war.

Here's a look at Colombia's close Israel ties and fallout:

WHY IS SECURITY COOPERATION BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND ISRAEL IMPORTANT?

Colombia and Israel have signed dozens of agreements on wide-ranging issues, including education and trade, since they established diplomatic relations in 1957. But nothing links them closer than military contracts.

Colombia's fighter jets are all Israeli-built. The more than 20 Kfir Israeli-made fighter jets were used by its air force in numerous attacks on remote guerrilla camps that debilitated the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. The attacks helped push the rebel group into peace talks that resulted in its disarmament in 2016.

But the fleet, purchased in the late 1980s, is aging and requires maintenance, which can only be carried out by an Israeli firm. Manufacturers in France, Sweden and the United States have approached Colombia's government with replacement options, but the spending priorities of Petro's administration are elsewhere.

Colombia's military also uses Galil rifles, which were designed in Israel and for which Colombia acquired the rights to manufacture and sell. Israel also assists the South American country with its cybersecurity needs.

WILL PETRO'S ANNOUNCEMENT AFFECT COLOMBIA'S MILITARY-RELATED CONTRACTS WITH ISRAEL?

It remains unclear.

Colombia's Foreign Ministry said Thursday in a statement that "all communications related to this announcement will be made through established official channels and will not be public." The ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press, while the Israeli Embassy in Bogota declined to address the issue.

However, a day before Petro announced his decision, Colombian Defense Minister Iván Velásquez told lawmakers that no new contracts will be signed with Israel, though existing ones will be fulfilled, including those for maintenance for the Kfir fighters and one for missile systems.

Velásquez said the government has established a "transition" committee that would seek to "diversify" suppliers to avoid depending on Israel. He added that one of the possibilities under consideration is the development of a rifle by the Colombian military industry to replace the Galil.

Security cooperation has been at the center of tensions between the two countries. Israel said in October that it would halt security exports to Colombia after Petro refused to condemn Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel that triggered the war and compared Israel's actions in Gaza to those of Nazi Germany.

In February, Petro announced the suspension of arms purchases from Israel.

For retired Gen. Guillermo León, former commander of the Colombian air force, the country's military capabilities will be affected if Petro's administration breaks its contract obligations or even if it complies with them but refuses to sign new ones.

"At the end of the year, maintenance and spare parts run out, and from then on, the fleet would rapidly enter a condition where we would no longer have the means to sustain it," he told AP. "This year, three aircraft were withdrawn from service due to compliance with their useful life cycle."

WHAT IS THE TRADE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES?

A free trade agreement between Colombia and Israel went into effect in August 2020. Israel now buys 1% of Colombia's total exports, which include coal, coffee and flowers.

According to Colombia's Ministry of Commerce, exports to Israel last year totaled \$499 million, which represents a drop of 53% from 2022.

Colombia's imports from Israel include electrical equipment, plastics and fertilizers.

Neither government has explained whether the diplomatic feud will affect the trade agreement.

Universities take steps to prevent pro-Palestinian protest disruptions of graduation ceremonies

By ED WHITE and ISABELLA VOLMERT Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. (AP) — With student protests over the Israel-Hamas war disrupting campuses nationwide, several major universities are intent on ensuring that commencement ceremonies — joyous milestones for graduates, their families and friends — go off without a hitch this weekend.

It won't be easy. Colleges are hiring extra security, screening attendees at venues and emphasizing that significant disruptions by pro-Palestinian protesters won't be tolerated. At the same time, they're pledging to honor free-speech rights by designating protest zones.

"Milestone is a perfect word," said Ken Burdick of Tampa, Florida, describing his daughter's graduation Saturday at the University of Michigan. He hopes the big day goes untarnished.

"People can exercise their First Amendment rights without disrupting or creating fear," Burdick said of protesters.

Here's how some schools are planning to balance things:

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

More than 8,000 graduates — and 63,000 spectators — are expected for Saturday's festivities inside Michigan Stadium, known as The Big House. There will be security screening, and disruptive protesters could be subject to removal. Public safety officers and staff who commonly monitor major events, such as fall football games, will be present. Author and historian Brad Meltzer is the featured speaker.

In March, an annual event recognizing students with high academic achievement ended early when pro-Palestinian protesters raised provocative signs and drowned out remarks by President Santa Ono, yelling, "You are funding genocide!" The university subsequently drafted a policy that could lead to student expulsions and staff dismissals for event disruptions, though it hasn't been finalized.

"It was painful for everyone who had gathered — and especially so for members of our Jewish community," Ono said two days later.

Protesters have erected dozens of tents on the Diag, a historic space for campus activism more than a mile away from the stadium. They're demanding that Michigan cut financial ties with companies connected to Israel. There has been no effort to break up the encampment and no arrests.

"We respect and uphold the principles of free expression, and also recognize that no one is entitled to disrupt university activities," Laurie McCauley, Michigan's chief academic officer, said in an email to students and staff about commencement.

Blake Richards, 25, is earning a bachelor's degree in biochemistry. Richards plans to be at the football stadium Saturday after participating in a smaller ceremony Thursday for chemistry students.

"It could take away some great feelings, muddle them," Richards said of any disruptions. "But truth be told, I'm not bothered. I know others have different opinions; I'm just happy to be here."

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

The Bloomington, Indiana, campus is designating protest zones outside Skjodt Assembly Hall and Memorial Stadium, where ceremonies will be held Friday for graduate students and Saturday for undergraduates. Nearly 10,000 students are eligible to attend.

A social media post circulating on Instagram urged protesters to wear "your keffiyeh along with your cap and gown" and walk out during Saturday's remarks by President Pamela Whitten.

Roughly 20 tents set up by protesters remained in place this week in an area known as Dunn Meadow, a mile from the stadium. Dozens of protesters have been arrested there recently, according to the Indiana Daily Student.

Maya Wasserman, a 22-year-old senior in management who is Jewish, said she and her family feel uncomfortable about the prospect of pro-Palestinian protests disrupting commencement. She expressed special concern for her mother and grandmother, who are Israeli.

"It's unfortunate because we want this event to be about graduating, not politics," Wasserman said.

At Dunn Meadow, students in lawn chairs or on blankets worked on their final assignments. Jessica Missey, a protester and senior, said she boycotted final exams; some professors, she said, simply canceled them. She has enjoyed the camaraderie at the encampment.

"Commencement is kind of just taking almost a little sidestep for me," Missey, 20, said.

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

A week after police arrested nearly 100 protesters at Northeastern University, the school is holding its commencement exercises Sunday at Fenway Park, home of the Boston Red Sox, for the fourth consecutive year.

The venue will help security officials monitor the crowd and limit what people can bring. Signs, banners, balloons and full-size flags are prohibited in the stadium, along with most bags. Renata Nyul, vice president for communications, said public safety staffing will be strengthened.

All those entering Fenway will need to pass through metal detectors. About 50,000 graduates, family and friends are expected.

Northeastern is one of several universities in the Boston area that have had pro-Palestinian encampments. Some have let the protests continue, though Northeastern's camp was broken up.

"While we realize that issues in the world prompt passionate viewpoints, the focus this weekend should be on our graduates and their remarkable achievements," Nyul said.

Michael Cohen hasn't taken the stand in Trump's hush money trial. But jurors are hearing his words

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JAKE OFFENHARTZ, PHILIP MARCELO and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The prosecution's star witness has yet to take the stand in Donald Trump's hush money trial. But jurors are already hearing Michael Cohen's words as prosecutors work to directly tie Trump to payments to silence women with damaging claims about him before the 2016 election.

The second week of testimony in the case will wrap up Friday after jurors heard a potentially crucial piece of evidence: a recording of Trump and Cohen, then his attorney, discussing a plan to pay off an ex-Playboy model who claimed to have an affair with Trump. The former president denies the affair.

Prosecutors have spent the week using detailed testimony about meetings, email exchanges, business transactions and bank accounts to build on the foundation of their case accusing the presumptive Republican presidential nominee of a scheme to illegally influence the 2016 election. They are setting the stage for pivotal testimony from Cohen, who paid porn actor Stormy Daniels \$130,000 for her silence before he went to prison for the hush money scheme.

Trump's defense has worked to poke holes in the credibility of prosecutors' witnesses, and show that

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Trump was trying to protect his reputation and family — not his campaign — by keeping the women quiet. The defense also suggested while questioning an attorney who represented two women in hush money negotiations that Trump was, in fact, the victim of extortion.

The recording played Thursday was secretly made by Cohen shortly before the 2016 election. Cohen is heard telling Trump about a plan to purchase the rights to former Playboy model Karen McDougal's story from the National Enquirer so that it would never come out. The tabloid had previously bought McDougal's story to bury it on Trump's behalf.

At one point in the recording, Cohen revealed that he had spoken to then-Trump Organization Chief Financial Officer Allen Weisselberg about "how to set the whole thing up with funding."

Trump can be heard responding: "What do we got to pay for this? One-fifty?"

Trump suggested the payment be made with cash, prompting Cohen to object by repeatedly saying "no." Trump then says "check" before the recording cuts off.

Prosecutors played the recording after calling to the stand Douglas Daus, a forensic analyst from the Manhattan district attorney's office who performed analyses on iPhones Cohen turned over to authorities during the investigation. Daus will return to the stand Friday morning, and it's not clear who will follow him.

Jurors also heard more than six hours of crucial testimony this week from Keith Davidson, a lawyer who represented McDougal and Daniels in their negotiations with Cohen and the National Enquirer — the tabloid that bought and buried negative stories in an industry practice known as "catch-and-kill." Davidson on Thursday described being shocked that his hidden-hand efforts might have contributed to Trump winning the 2016 election.

"What have we done?" Davidson texted the then-editor of the National Enquirer on election night when it became clear that Trump was going to win. "Oh my god," the tabloid editor responded.

"There was an understanding that our efforts may have in some way — strike that — our activities may have in some way assisted the presidential campaign of Donald Trump," Davidson told jurors.

Trump's lawyers sought earlier in the day to blunt the potential harm of Davidson's testimony by getting him to acknowledge that he never had any interactions with Trump — only Cohen. In fact, Davidson said, he had never been in the same room as Trump until his testimony.

"I had no personal interactions with Donald Trump. It either came from my clients, Mr. Cohen or some other source, but certainly not him," Davidson said.

Trump is charged with 34 counts of falsifying internal Trump Organization business records. The charges stem from things like invoices and checks that were deemed legal expenses in Trump Organization records when prosecutors say they were really reimbursements to Cohen for the \$130,000 hush money payment to Daniels.

As China's Xi Jinping visits Europe, Ukraine, trade and investment are likely to top the agenda

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Ukraine, trade and investment are expected to dominate Chinese leader Xi Jinping's first trip to Europe in five years, as the Asian giant rebuilds its foreign relations after a prolonged absence during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Xi will start the tour in Paris on Monday, meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron, who has been stressing the idea of European strategic autonomy from the U.S. On a visit to Beijing last year, Macron courted controversy by saying France would not necessarily always align with the U.S. in foreign policy, an apparent reference to American support for the self-governing republic of Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

After leaving France, Xi will visit Hungary and Serbia, both seen as China-friendly and close to Russian President Vladimir Putin, rebuffing Western criticism of his full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Xi's European visits will be closely followed in Washington for signs of diminishing support for its key foreign policy goals.

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The Chinese leader will arrive in France just as Paris is putting the finishing touches on its preparations for hosting the Summer Olympics, an event in which China invests huge amount of national prestige.

France sees Xi's visit, which officially marks 60 years of French-Chinese diplomatic relations, as an important diplomatic moment, and wants to focus on China's broader relations with the EU. Macron invited European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to the talks Monday.

It comes a month before Macron, who positions himself as the diplomatic leader of Europe, hosts Biden for a similar state visit.

It is also a sign of "the good vibes from Macron's visit to China in April last year," said Kerry Brown, professor of Chinese Studies and director of the Lau China Institute at King's College London.

"This is a highly strategic visit to Europe by Xi. And in his itinerary you can divine the runes of Chinese policy on Europe now, bolstering the traditional links as far as possible, and reinforcing new ones," Brown said.

Xi's is also visiting Budapest, where Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in power for 14 years, is facing political challenges from the opposition over his authoritarian style.

Hungary has straddled a middle ground between its membership in the EU and NATO and an unusual openness to diplomatic and trade relationships with eastern autocracies such as Russia and China.

Orbán, a right-wing populist who has forged close ties with Russia, delayed Sweden's entry into NATO for months. China has cited NATO expansion as provoking Russia to invade Ukraine.

Hungary is the first EU member to participate in Xi's signature Belt and Road Initiative that seeks to build billions of dollars of roads, ports, power plants and other infrastructure across Asia, Africa and beyond.

Orbán was the only EU leader to attend a conference in Beijing on the BRI, which has been criticized for burying participating countries in debt and failing to deliver on promised investments, something that prompted Italy to drop out last year.

Despite that, Hungary's government has deepened its economic ties with China, with the proliferation of Chinese electric vehicle (EV) battery factories across the country gaining the most attention. Near Debrecen, Hungary's second-largest city, construction is underway of a nearly 550-acre, 7.3 billion euro (\$7.9 billion) EV battery plant, Hungary's largest-ever foreign direct investment.

China has also invested heavily in infrastructure to link Hungary with its southern neighbor Serbia, Xi's next stop on his European tour.

In 2014, Hungary and Serbia concluded an agreement with Beijing to modernize the railway between their capitals of Budapest and Belgrade, part of a Belt and Road plan to link up with the Chinese-controlled port of Piraeus in Greece, to the south, an entry point for Chinese goods to Central and Eastern Europe.

The more than \$2 billion project is expected to be completed in 2026, after numerous delays.

In Serbia, Xi will hold talks with President Aleksandar Vucic, with whose government China has built strong relations.

The two countries have a long history of friendship, particularly since 1999, when NATO bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, killing three Chinese nationals, during the air war to end Serbia's brutal crackdown on ethnic Albanian separatists in Kosovo.

The U.S. apologized, saying faulty target selection was to blame, but the incident led to violent attacks on U.S. diplomatic installations in China and fueled anti-American sentiment in both countries that endures to this day.

In 2022, shortly after the Russian assault on Ukraine, Serbia took semi-secret delivery of a sophisticated Chinese anti-aircraft system flown in on six Chinese Air Force Y-20 transport planes. The arms delivery over the territory of at least two NATO member states, Turkey and Bulgaria, was seen by experts as a demonstration of China's growing global reach.

China claims neutrality in the Ukraine conflict but Xi and Putin declared their governments had a "no limits friendship" before Moscow's attack on Ukraine. China has refused to call the Russian assault an invasion and has been accused of bolstering Russia's capacity to produce weapons and its military advantage against Ukraine, which is awaiting tens of billions in Western military aid.

A U.S. military aid bill passed last week allots \$61 billion for Ukraine, as well as \$8 billion to counter

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Chinese threats in Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific, which China has condemned as a dangerous provocation. China's foreign ministry said the U.S. position on Chinese defense trade with Russia was hypocritical when considered alongside the amount of military assistance Washington is providing to Kyiv.

China denies selling arms to Russia and the U.S. says it has found no direct evidence of such evidence of such. However, China does sell machine tools, microelectronics and other technology that Moscow in turn is using to produce missiles, tanks, aircraft and other weaponry for use in its war against Ukraine, according to a U.S. assessment.

New York made Donald Trump and could convict him. But for now, he's using it to campaign

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — He's visiting Manhattan construction sites, decrying local crime and holding court in his gilded Fifth Avenue penthouse.

After a years-long breakup with his hometown, Donald Trump is back in New York, this time as a criminal defendant. Stuck here most weekdays for the duration of his criminal hush money trial, the Queens-born presumptive GOP nominee has been conjuring images of his old days as a celebrity developer, reality TV star and tabloid fixture with weekly local campaign stops as he settles back into the place that made him, voted against him twice — and may end up convicting him.

After leaving court Thursday, Trump made another stop, heading to a midtown Manhattan firehouse with boxes of pizza in hand. Trump spent about 10 minutes shaking hands, posing for photos and chatting with several dozen firefighters and other personnel there before returning to Trump Tower for the night.

The felony trial has curtailed Trump's ability to campaign across the country. But it also means Trump is often spending four days a week in the nation's media capital, with access to ready-made locations for campaign events that he can use to court voters as he tries to reclaim the White House.

"While President Trump is forced to spend the next few weeks here in Manhattan, he should use that opportunity to get to communities around the city," said former U.S. Rep. Lee Zeldin, a Republican who challenged Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul in 2022 and lost a closer than expected race.

Zeldin declined to detail private conversations with Trump campaign aides, but noted his gubernatorial campaign had included stops in heavily Asian American neighborhoods like Chinatown and Flushing in Queens, Dominican communities in the south Bronx, and Orthodox Jewish communities, among others.

While many were longtime Democratic neighborhoods, he said, "they were excited that I showed up and I was talking to them about issues that they cared about more than blind partisan loyalty."

He noted news coverage of Trump's stops carries them far beyond local businesses or community groups.

"That video that gets taken ends up getting shared widely all over the country," he said.

Trump's stops in heavily Democratic New York City have felt sometimes more like a bid for mayor than a run to reclaim the White House.

Thursday's stop at the firehouse was captured by a large gaggle of reporters and cameras penned across the street. Inside the station, Trump thanked staff for their service, said FDNY spokesman Jim Long. Trump had visited the same firehouse, as well as a next-door police precinct, when he returned to the city in 2021 after leaving office to commemorate the anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks.

"We appreciate whoever supports our members at the FDNY, no matter their political affiliation," the FDNY said in a statement, noting they have hosted leaders including former President Barack Obama, former Vice President Mike Pence and every one of the city's mayors over the years.

Trump's other visits have drawn large crowds. After the second day of jury selection, the former president was whisked by motorcade to a bodega in a majority-Latino section of Harlem, where hundreds of supporters and onlookers gathered behind police barricades to catch a glimpse.

The visit to the bodega, which had been the site of a violent crime, also allowed Trump to rail against the district attorney overseeing the hush money case. Alvin Bragg faced backlash after he brought murder charges against a store cashier who stabbed a customer to death in apparent self-defense. The charges

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were eventually dropped.

Last week, Trump visited the site of an unfinished skyscraper — not one of his own — to shake hands with cheering construction workers, sign hats and helmets and pose for pictures with hard hats and steel beams in the background.

The image harkened back to his roots as a developer and an era when he was a fixture of the city, frequently featured on the covers of New York's cutthroat tabloids as he talked up projects on which he slapped his name in big gold letters.

"We've built a lot of great buildings in the city with these people," Trump said at the stop.

Trump has also been using his signature Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue to host meetings with foreign leaders preparing for a potential second Trump term, including former Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso and Polish President Andrzej Duda.

Trump, who officially became a Florida resident in 2019, had spent little time in New York after he took office in 2017. He visited only a handful of times as president, and officially decamped to his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida after leaving the White House in 2021.

When he announced in 2019 that he was making Florida his official home, he said in a post on Twitter — now X — that he would always "cherish" New York, "but unfortunately, despite the fact that I pay millions of dollars in city, state and local taxes each year, I have been treated very badly by the political leaders of both the city and state." He later told the New York Post that he'd largely avoided the city as president to avoid snarling traffic with his presidential motorcade.

That meant largely abandoning Trump Tower, where he filmed "The Apprentice" and later staged the 2016 campaign launch that he famously entered via escalator. After his surprise victory, reporters camped out in the building's lobby for weeks as Trump paraded a line of White House hopefuls through the lobby, along with celebrities like Kanye West.

Trump had long told aides that he wanted to campaign in his home city, insisting he had a chance of winning, even though New York remains overwhelmingly Democratic. In 2020, President Joe Biden beat him with 60% of the vote.

Beyond his unannounced stops to local businesses, Trump has also talked of holding rallies in the south Bronx and at one of the city's most famous venues, Madison Square Garden.

"We're going to have a big rally, honoring the police and honoring the firemen and everybody, honoring a lot of people, including teachers, by the way," he said after court last week. "We're honoring teachers, because teachers have been very badly maligned with some very poor leadership. But we'll be honoring the people that make New York work. And we'll be doing a number of large rallies, it'll be very exciting."

And he has increasingly weighed in on local news events, including calling into his friend Sean Hannity's primetime Fox News show while a police raid was underway to remove and arrest pro-Palestinian protesters at Columbia University.

"We're going to make a heavy play for New York," Trump said during the visit to the Harlem bodega last month. "I love this city and it's gotten so bad in the last three years, four years, and we're going to straighten New York out."

He also said there were upsides to being stuck in the city.

"It makes me campaign locally," he said, his New York accent coming out even more thickly as he added, "I think there's more press here than there is if I went out to some nice location."

US jobs report for April will likely point to a slower but still-strong pace of hiring

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The American economy likely delivered another solid hiring gain in April, showing continuing durability in the face of the highest interest rates in two decades.

The Labor Department is expected to report Friday that employers added a healthy 233,000 jobs last month, down from a sizzling 303,000 in March but still a decidedly healthy total, according to a survey of

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forecasters by the data firm FactSet.

The unemployment rate is forecast to stay at 3.8%. That would make it the 27th straight month with a jobless rate below 4% — the longest such streak since the 1960s.

The state of the economy is weighing on voters' minds as the November presidential campaign intensifies. Despite the strength of the job market, Americans remain generally exasperated by high prices, and many of them assign blame to President Joe Biden.

Yet America's job market has repeatedly proved more robust than almost anyone had predicted. When the Federal Reserve began aggressively raising rates two years ago to fight a punishing inflation surge, most economists expected the resulting jump in borrowing costs to cause a recession and drive unemployment to painfully high levels.

The Fed raised its benchmark rate 11 times from March 2022 to July 2023, taking it to the highest level since 2001. Inflation did steadily cool as it was supposed to — from a year-over-year peak of 9.1% in June 2022 to 3.5% in March.

Yet the resilient strength of the job market and the overall economy, fueled by steady consumer spending, has kept inflation persistently above the Fed's 2% target. As a result, the Fed is delaying any consideration of interest rate cuts until it gains more confidence that inflation is steadily slowing toward its target.

So far this year, monthly job growth is averaging 276,000, up from an already solid 251,000 last year.

"If you look at the last couple of months, it has been a safe bet to take the optimistic side," said Aaron Terrazas, chief economist at the employment website Glassdoor.

That said, the job market has been showing some signs of eventually slowing. This week, for example, the government reported that job openings fell in March to 8.5 million, the fewest in more than three years. Yet that is still a vast number of vacancies: Before 2021, monthly job openings had never topped 8 million, a threshold they have now exceeded every month since March 2021.

The number of Americans quitting their jobs — a figure that generally reflects confidence in finding a better position elsewhere — fell in March to its lowest level since January 2021.

A more stable workforce, Terrazas said, is helping many businesses run more efficiently.

"When firms have high numbers of workers quitting," he said, "that takes up time to find and train new workers. It's incredibly destructive at the company level."

Now, "there are finally people in seat who know what they're doing, know the processes, know the systems. You don't need to waste a lot of resources on training."

Economists have noted that hiring has recently been concentrated in three employment sectors: health-care and social assistance; leisure and hospitality (largely hotels, restaurants and bars); and government. Those three categories accounted for nearly 70% of job growth in March.

More concerning, the progress against inflation has stalled, raising doubts about the likely timetable for Fed rate cuts, which would, over time, reduce the cost of mortgages, auto loans and other consumer and business borrowing. Most economists envision no rate cuts before fall at the earliest.

On a month-over-month basis, consumer inflation hasn't declined since October. The 3.5% year-over-year inflation rate for March was still running well above the Fed's 2% target.

The central bank's inflation fighters will be watching Friday's jobs report for any signs that the inflation picture might be shifting. From the Fed's perspective, Terrazas said, "the best outcome we can hope for Friday is slower but still solid payroll growth, steady employment and, most importantly, slowing wage pressure."

Many economists say that year-over-year increases in hourly pay must slow to about 3.5% to be consistent with the Fed's inflation goals. That probably didn't happen last month: The forecasters surveyed by FactSet project that hourly wages rose 4% from a year earlier, just below the 4.1% year-over-year rise in March.

More than 2,100 people have been arrested during pro-Palestinian protests on US college campuses

By JULIE WATSON, CHRISTOPHER L. KELLER, CAROLYN THOMPSON and STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Police have arrested more than 2,100 people during pro-Palestinian protests at college campuses across the United States in recent weeks, sometimes using riot gear, tactical vehicles and flash-bang devices to clear tent encampments and occupied buildings. One officer accidentally discharged his gun inside a Columbia University administration building while clearing out protesters camped inside, authorities disclosed Thursday.

No one was injured by the officer's mistake late Tuesday inside Hamilton Hall on the Columbia campus, the NYPD said Thursday. He was trying to use the flashlight attached to his gun at the time and instead fired a single round that struck a frame on the wall.

There were other officers but no students in the immediate vicinity, officials said. Body camera footage shows when the officer's gun went off, but the district attorney's office is conducting a review, a standard practice.

More than 100 people were taken into custody during the Columbia crackdown, just a fraction of the total arrests stemming from recent campus protests over the Israel-Hamas war. A tally by The Associated Press on Thursday found at least 50 incidents of arrests at 40 different U.S. colleges or universities since April 18.

Early Thursday, officers surged against a crowd of demonstrators at University of California, Los Angeles, ultimately taking at least 200 protesters into custody after hundreds defied orders to leave, some forming human chains as police fired flash-bangs to break up the crowds. Police tore apart a fortified encampment's barricade of plywood, pallets, metal fences and dumpsters, then pulled down canopies and tents.

Like at UCLA, tent encampments of protesters calling on universities to stop doing business with Israel or companies they say support the war in Gaza have spread across other campuses nationwide in a student movement unlike any other this century. Iranian state television carried live images of the police action at UCLA, as did Qatar's pan-Arab Al Jazeera satellite network. Live images of Los Angeles also played across Israeli television networks.

Israel has branded the protests antisemitic, while Israel's critics say it uses those allegations to silence opposition. Although some protesters have been caught on camera making antisemitic remarks or violent threats, protest organizers — some of whom are Jewish — call it a peaceful movement to defend Palestinian rights and protest the war.

President Joe Biden on Thursday defended the right of students to peaceful protest but decried the disorder of recent days.

The demonstrations began at Columbia on April 17 with students calling for an end to the Israel-Hamas war, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the Health Ministry there. Israel launched its offensive in Gaza after Hamas militants killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, on Oct. 7 and took roughly 250 hostages in an attack on southern Israel.

On April 18, the NYPD cleared Columbia's initial encampment and arrested roughly 100 protesters. The demonstrators set up new tents and defied threats of suspension, and escalated their actions early Tuesday by occupying Hamilton Hall, an administration building that was similarly seized in 1968 by students protesting racism and the Vietnam War.

Roughly 20 hours later, officers stormed the hall. Video showed police with zip ties and riot shields streaming through a second-floor window. Police had said protesters inside presented no substantial resistance.

The officer's gun went off at 9:38 p.m., the NYPD said, about 10 minutes after police started pouring into Hamilton Hall. The department did not name the officer, whose actions were first reported by news outlet The City on Thursday.

The confrontations at UCLA also played out over several days this week. UCLA Chancellor Gene Block told alumni on a call Thursday afternoon that the trouble started after a permitted pro-Israel rally was held on campus Sunday and fights broke out and "live mice" were tossed into the pro-Palestinian encampment

later that day.

In the following days, administrators tried to find a peaceful solution with members of the encampment and expected things to remain stable, Block said.

That changed late Tuesday, he said, when counterdemonstrators attacked the pro-Palestinian encampment. Campus administrators and police did not intervene or call for backup for hours. No one was arrested that night, but at least 15 protesters were injured. The delayed response drew criticism from political leaders, including California Gov. Gavin Newsom, and officials pledged an independent review.

"We certainly weren't thinking that we'd end up with a large number of violent people, that hadn't happened before," Block said on the call.

By Wednesday, the encampment had become "much more of a bunker" and there was no other solution but to have police dismantle it, he said.

The hourslong standoff went into Thursday morning as officers warned over loudspeakers that there would be arrests if the crowd — at the time more than 1,000 strong inside the encampment as well as outside of it — did not disperse. Hundreds left voluntarily, while another 200-plus remained and were ultimately taken into custody.

Meanwhile, protest encampments at other schools across the U.S. have been cleared by police — resulting in more arrests — or closed up voluntarily. But University of Minnesota officials reached an agreement with protesters not to disrupt commencements, and similar compromises have been made at Northwestern University in suburban Chicago, Rutgers University in New Jersey and Brown University in Rhode Island.

Ariel Dardashti, a graduating UCLA senior studying global studies and sociology, said no student should feel unsafe at school.

"It should not get to the point where students are being arrested," Dardashti said on campus Thursday.

Dardashti, who is Jewish, said he can relate to the trauma suffered by Palestinians.

"When my dad was fleeing Iran, he prayed that his children wouldn't have to face antisemitism," Dardashti said. "We're afraid of having to flee again in the same way our parents did."

Arizona's Democratic governor signs a bill to repeal 1864 ban on most abortions

By ANITA SNOW and MORGAN LEE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Democratic Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs has relegated a Civil War-era ban on most abortions to the past by signing a bill Thursday to repeal it.

Hobbs says the move is just the beginning of a fight to protect reproductive health care in Arizona. The repeal of the 1864 law that the state Supreme Court recently reinstated won't take effect until 90 days after the legislative session ends, which typically happens in June or July.

Abortion rights advocates say they're hopeful a court will step in to prevent what could be a confusing landscape of access for girls and women across Arizona as laws are introduced and then reversed.

The effort to repeal the long-dormant law, which bans all abortions except those done to save a patient's life, won final legislative approval Wednesday in a 16-14 vote of the Senate, as two GOP lawmakers joined with Democrats.

Hobbs denounced "a ban that was passed by 27 men before Arizona was even a state, at a time when America was at war over the right to own slaves, a time before women could even vote."

"This ban needs to be repealed, I said it in 2022 when Roe was overturned, and I said it again and again as governor," Hobbs said during the bill signing.

In early April, Arizona's Supreme Court voted to restore the 1864 law that provided no exceptions for rape or incest and allows abortions only if the mother's life is in jeopardy. The majority opinion suggested doctors could be prosecuted and sentenced to up to five years in prison if convicted.

Democrats, who are the minority in the Legislature, struck back with the help of a handful of Republicans in the House and Senate to advance a repeal in a matter of weeks to Hobbs' desk.

A crowd of lawmakers — mostly women — joined in the signing ceremony with celebratory airs, includ-

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ing taking selfies and exchanging congratulations among Democrats.

The scene stood in sharp contrast to Wednesday's vote in the Senate that extended for hours as Republicans described their motivations in personal, emotional and even biblical terms — including graphic descriptions of abortion procedures and amplified audio recordings of a fetal heartbeat.

Meanwhile, across the country, an abortion rights initiative in South Dakota submitted far more signatures than required to make the ballot this fall. In Florida, a ban took effect against most abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, before many people even know they are pregnant.

In Arizona, once the repeal takes effect in the fall, a 2002 statute banning abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy will become the state's prevailing abortion law.

Whether the 1864 law will be enforced in the coming months depends on who is asked. The anti-abortion group defending the ban, Alliance Defending Freedom, maintains county prosecutors can begin enforcing it once the Supreme Court's decision becomes final, which hasn't yet occurred.

Planned Parenthood Arizona filed a motion Wednesday asking the court to prevent a pause in abortion services until the repeal takes effect. Democratic Attorney General Kris Mayes has joined in that action.

The Supreme Court set deadlines next week for briefings on the motion.

On Thursday, former Democratic state Rep. Athena Salman celebrated approval of the repeal she initially proposed in 2019 — three years before *Roe v. Wade* was overturned.

Until then, Arizona's near-total abortion ban had been blocked because the U.S. Supreme Court decision guaranteed the constitutional right to an abortion nationwide. Then-Attorney General Mark Brnovich, a Republican, swiftly made a case for enforcing the 1864 ban.

Still, the law hasn't been carried out because it was stuck in legal limbo until the Arizona Supreme Court weighed in.

Salman, who resigned in January to lead an abortion rights group, said she can't stop thinking about what the repeal means for her daughters.

"Future generations will not have to live under the restrictions and the interference that we have had to experience," she said.

Arizona Rep. Stephanie Stahl Hamilton, a Democrat who was key in repealing the ban, said she spent her early years on the Navajo Nation where her parents were schoolteachers and saw firsthand people being denied reproductive rights. The main health care option on the reservation is the Indian Health Service, which operates under the Hyde Amendment that bars the use of federal funding for abortions except in cases of rape, incest or threats to the patient's life.

She said she also watched her sister-in-law struggle with two difficult pregnancies, one that resulted in a stillbirth and a nonviable one in which "they had to make the heartbreaking decision to terminate that pregnancy, because there was no brain development."

President Joe Biden's campaign team believes voters' anger over the fall of *Roe v. Wade* gave him the political advantage in battleground states like Arizona, where he beat former President Donald Trump by about 10,000 votes.

The issue has divided Republican leaders.

People in the gallery of the Arizona Senate on Wednesday jeered and interrupted Republican Lawmaker Shawna Bolick as she explained her vote in favor of the repeal.

Republican lawmakers more broadly are considering putting one or more abortion proposals on the November ballot. Such efforts could compete with Democratic-backed efforts to enshrine abortion access in the state constitution — up until a fetus could survive outside the womb, typically around 24 weeks, with some exceptions — to save the patient's life, or to protect her physical or mental health.

Dr. Ronald Yunis, a Phoenix-based obstetrician-gynecologist who also provides abortions, called the repeal a positive development for patients who might otherwise leave Arizona for medical care.

"This is good for ensuring that women won't have to travel to other states just to get the health care they need," Yunis said. "I was not too concerned because I have a lot of confidence in our governor and attorney general. I'm certain they will continue finding ways to protect women."

Today's campus protests aren't nearly as big or violent as those last century — at least, not yet

By ALLEN G. BREED and JOCELYN GECKER Associated Press

In a way, the black-and-white Palestinian scarf draped over Hannah Sattler's shoulders this week and the tie-dyed T-shirts of 1968 are woven from a common thread.

Like so many college students across the country protesting the Israel-Hamas war, Sattler feels the historic weight of the anti-Vietnam war demonstrations of the 1960s and 70s.

"They always talked about the '68 protest as sort of a North Star," Sattler, 27, a graduate student of international human rights policy at Columbia University, said of the campus organizers there.

"Even the choice to take over Hamilton Hall was always the plan from the start of the encampment," she says. "Not only because it just made a lot of sense logistically, but it also has that ... strong historical connection with the 60s protests."

Still, although it might be tempting to compare the nationwide campus protests to the anti-Vietnam War movement of a half century ago, Robert Cohen says that would be an overreaction.

"I would say that this is the biggest, in the United States, in the 21st century," said Cohen, a professor of history and social studies at New York University. "But you could say, 'Well, that's like being the tallest building in Wichita, Kansas.'"

So far, there have been no bombings, like the one in August 1970 at the University of Wisconsin that killed a postdoctoral researcher and did \$6 million worth of damage. There has been no repeat of the infamous Kent State massacre of May 1970, when National Guard troops opened fire on protesters at the Ohio campus, killing four.

Police have cleared encampments and made more than 2,000 arrests, and some, like the crackdown Thursday at UCLA have involved violent clashes. A police officer involved in clearing Columbia's Hamilton Hall of protesters Tuesday discharged his gun inside the building. But demonstrations elsewhere have been peaceful and even led to agreements with administrators to address students' demands.

Yet, to some, there is a feeling that the situation is just one hair-trigger moment away from tragedy, says Mark Naison, who took part in the sometimes violent protests at Columbia in 1968.

"People are terrified," said Naison a professor of history and African & African American Studies at nearby Fordham University.

In many ways, this does feel like the America of what Cohen calls "the long 60s."

In September 1970, barely five months after the Kent State tragedy, the President's Commission on Campus Unrest delivered to Richard M. Nixon a "Letter To The American People."

"This crisis has roots in divisions of American society as deep as any since the Civil War," the panel wrote. "The divisions are reflected in violent acts and harsh rhetoric and in the enmity of those Americans who see themselves as occupying opposing camps."

Watching the gyre of emotions on campuses from Connecticut to California, those words feel as if they could have been written this week. Even U.S. Rep. Lauren Boebert made an allusion to that earlier time.

"This is not the summer of love!" the Colorado Republican shouted through a bullhorn during a visit to chide protesters at George Washington University on Wednesday.

But Cohen says emotions — and sheer numbers — are nowhere near the levels they reached at the height of the Vietnam era.

"Look. NYU was one of the first campuses to mobilize," he says. "Maybe there's 200 students — maybe. There are 30,000 (undergraduate) students at NYU, right?"

Another difference that has struck observers is the quick crackdown by campus authorities. In 1968, students occupied Columbia's Hamilton Hall for nearly a week before authorities moved in. The bust — when it finally came — saw more than 700 arrested.

"It's funny because Columbia is very proud of ... Columbia students' history of activism," said Ilana Gut, a senior at the university's sister school Barnard College. "So their attitudes toward the modern-day activ-

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ists, at least in the eyes of protestors, is very ironic -- that they're so proud of their past protestors, but so violently repressive of their modern-day ones."

Robert Korstad, who protested in the 1960s and is now a professor emeritus of public policy at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, does see comparisons.

Then, as now, they were protesting a violent war. And now, in addition, students have felt pervasive conflict, said Korstad, with the country's rash of mass shootings and the murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police.

"I'm really thinking about what's motivating these young people and what they've grown up with and thinking about over their short lifetime," he says.

Another disturbing difference between then and now, says Jack Radey, is the lack of respect on campuses for differing views.

Radey was a 17-year-old activist during the original Free Speech Movement at the University of California, Berkeley. He says today's students have succeeded in amplifying the Palestinian cause, but, in some cases, at the cost of civility.

"We did not look on those students who had not joined the free speech movement as idiots or traitors, but as people we needed to convince," said Radey, president of the movement's archives. "You don't do that by violence or with super-heated rhetoric."

Some, like Korstad, believe the campus unrest hastened the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. Many of those protesting today want their colleges and universities to divest from companies that do business with Israel or otherwise contribute to the war effort.

At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass., protesters are asking MIT to end all research contracts with Israel's Ministry of Defence, which they estimate total \$11 million since 2015. Students there have taken direct inspiration from MIT protests against the Vietnam War and South African apartheid, including turning to the archives to study those protesters' strategies and using some of the same slogans on their signs and setting up the encampment in the same place.

But the group also learned from the failure of protesters in the 1980s to convince the campus to divest from South Africa.

"We acknowledge that disclosure and divestment is a longer process," said chemistry graduate student David Berkinsky, who is part of MIT's Jews for Ceasefire group. "That's why we have such a pinpointed request. We think it's a reasonable ask."

With such widespread support for Israel, Cohen says major changes at most campuses are unlikely.

"This is not an American war, except the Americans are, their firepower is being used by the Israelis," Cohen says. "It's different when you have American troops there and you might be drafted."

Still, students like Sattler now feel a part of a larger tradition.

The Baltimore native is Jewish, but has been wearing a keffiyeh scarf to the protests. Sattler, whose parents were in college during the 70s, said the period has very much informed the current action, noting that students watched a documentary about 1968 and had people from those demonstrations speak to the protesters.

Sattler says the Columbia protesters were specifically trained in non-violent tactics and de-escalation. "I would not be a part of a movement if it wasn't centered in nonviolence," she says.

She is willing to be arrested, if that is how the authorities wish to respond.

But not all share that level of commitment.

Wearing a stretchy Spiderman mask and black hoodie, 18-year-old Brayden Lang hung on the fringe of the protest as fellow Northern Arizona University students carrying black-red-white-and-green Palestinian flags swarmed around him.

Asked if he felt a kinship with the student demonstrators of the 1960s and 70s, the freshman business marketing major responded innocently: "You're talking about the women's suffrage movement?"

Earlier this week, police there dismantled a small fence made of chicken wire as well as nearly two dozen tents. About 20 people were arrested.

Lang says he will continue to protest. But he says he won't go to jail for this cause. "They have much

more bravery than I do," he said of those who were arrested. "They're much more willing to commit than I am. I am not willing to go that far."

Jurors in Trump hush money trial hear recording of pivotal call on plan to buy affair story

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, PHILIP MARCELO, ERIC TUCKER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — Jurors in the hush money trial of Donald Trump heard a recording Thursday of him discussing with his then-lawyer and personal fixer a plan to purchase the silence of a Playboy model who has said she had an affair with the former president.

A visibly irritated Trump leaned forward at the defense table, and jurors appeared riveted as prosecutors played the September 2016 recording that attorney Michael Cohen secretly made of himself briefing his celebrity client on a plan to buy Karen McDougal's story of an extramarital relationship.

Though the recording surfaced years ago, it is perhaps the most colorful piece of evidence presented to jurors so far to connect Trump to the hush money payments at the center of his criminal trial in Manhattan. It followed hours of testimony from a lawyer who negotiated the deal for McDougal's silence and admitted to being stunned that his hidden-hand efforts might have contributed to Trump's White House victory.

"What have we done?" attorney Keith Davidson texted the then-editor of the National Enquirer, which had buried stories of sexual encounters to prevent them surfacing in the final days of the bitterly contested presidential race. "Oh my god," came the response from Dylan Howard.

"There was an understanding that our efforts may have in some way...our activities may have in some way assisted the presidential campaign of Donald Trump," Davidson told jurors, though he acknowledged under cross-examination that he dealt directly with Cohen and never Trump.

The testimony from Davidson was designed to directly connect the hush money payments to Trump's presidential ambitions and to bolster prosecutors' argument that the case is about interference in the 2016 election rather than simply sex and money. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg has sought to establish that link not just to secure a conviction but also to persuade the public of the significance of the case, which may be the only one of four Trump prosecutions to reach trial this year.

"This is sort of gallows humor. It was on election night as the results were coming in," Davidson explained. "There was sort of surprise amongst the broadcasters and others that Mr. Trump was leading in the polls, and there was a growing sense that folks were about ready to call the election."

Davidson is seen as a vital building block for the prosecution's case that Trump and his allies schemed to bury unflattering stories in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election. He represented both McDougal and porn actor Stormy Daniels in negotiations that resulted in the purchase of rights to their claims of sexual encounters with Trump and those stories getting squelched, a tabloid industry practice known as "catch-and-kill."

Davidson is one of multiple key players testifying in advance of Cohen, the star prosecution witness who paid Daniels \$130,000 for her silence and also recorded himself, weeks before the election, telling Trump about a plan to purchase the rights to McDougal's story from the National Enquirer so it would never come out. The tabloid had previously bought McDougal's story to bury it on Trump's behalf.

At one point in the recording, Cohen revealed that he had spoken to then-Trump Organization Chief Financial Officer Allen Weisselberg about "how to set the whole thing up with funding." To which Trump can be heard responding: "What do we got to pay for this? One-fifty?"

Trump can be heard suggesting that the payment be made with cash, prompting Cohen to object by saying "no" multiple times. Trump can then be heard saying "check" before the recording cuts off.

Trump's lawyers sought earlier in the day to blunt the potential harm of Davidson's testimony by getting him to acknowledge that he never had any interactions with Trump — only Cohen. In fact, Davidson said, he had never been in the same room as Trump until his testimony.

He also said he was unfamiliar with the Trump Organization's record-keeping practices and that any

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impressions he had of Trump himself came through others.

"I had no personal interactions with Donald Trump. It either came from my clients, Mr. Cohen or some other source, but certainly not him," Davidson said.

The line of questioning from Trump attorney Emil Bove appeared intended to cast Trump as removed from the negotiations and to suggest that Cohen was handling the hush-money matters on his own.

Bove also noted that Davidson had been involved in similar payments for clients that had nothing to do with presidential politics, grilling him about previous instances in which he solicited money to suppress embarrassing stories, including one involving wrestler Hulk Hogan.

By the time Davidson negotiated hush money payments for McDougal and Daniels, he was "pretty well versed in coming right up to the line without committing extortion, right?" Bove asked

"I had familiarized myself with the law," Davidson replied.

Also Thursday, jurors viewed a confidential agreement requiring Daniels to keep quiet about her claims that she had a tryst with the married Trump a decade earlier. The agreement, dated less than two weeks before the 2016 presidential election, called for her to receive \$130,000 in exchange for her silence.

The money was paid by Cohen, and the agreement referred to both Trump and Daniels with pseudonyms: David Dennison and Peggy Peterson.

"It is understood and agreed that the true name and identity of the person referred to as 'DAVID DENNISON' in the Settlement Agreement is Donald Trump," the document stated, with Trump's name written in by hand.

After the payment was made, Trump's company reimbursed Cohen and logged the payments to him as legal expenses, prosecutors have said in charging the former president with 34 felony counts of falsifying business records — a charge punishable by up to four years in prison.

While testifying Thursday, Davidson also recalled Cohen ranting to him about Trump in a phone conversation about a month after the 2016 election, complaining that he had been passed over for a job in the new administration and that Trump had yet to reimburse him for the Daniels payment.

He also recalled Cohen telling him that he and Trump were "very upset" when The Wall Street Journal published an article that exposed a separate \$150,000 National Enquirer arrangement with McDougal, who has said she and Trump had an affair, just days before the election.

"He wanted to know who the source of the article was, why someone would be the source of this type of article. He was very upset about the timing," Davidson said of Cohen. "He stated that his boss was very upset, and he threatened to sue Karen McDougal."

Trump has pleaded not guilty and denied relationships with either woman, as well as any wrongdoing in the case.

Before the start of testimony, prosecutors requested \$1,000 fines for each of four comments by Trump that they say violated a judge's gag order barring him from attacking witnesses, jurors and others closely connected to the case. Such a penalty would be on top of a \$9,000 fine that Judge Juan M. Merchan imposed Tuesday related to nine separate violations that he found.

Merchan did not immediately rule on the request for fresh sanctions, though he indicated he was not particularly concerned about one of the four statements flagged by prosecutors.

The prospect of further punishment underscores the challenges Trump the presidential candidate faces in adjusting to the role of criminal defendant subject to rigid courtroom protocol that he does not control. It also remains to be seen whether any rebuke from the court will lead Trump to adjust his behavior given the campaign trail benefit he believes he derives from painting the case as politically motivated.

Send us Patriots: Ukraine's battered energy plants seek air defenses against Russian attacks

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — At a Ukrainian power plant repeatedly hit by Russian aerial attacks, equipment department chief Oleh has a one-word answer when asked what Ukraine's battered energy industry needs most: "Patriot."

Ukrainian energy workers are struggling to repair the damage from intensifying airstrikes aimed at pulverizing Ukraine's energy grid, hobbling the economy and sapping the public's morale. Staff worry they will lose the race to prepare for winter unless allies come up with air-defense systems like the U.S.-made Patriots to stop Russian attacks inflicting more destruction on already damaged plants.

"Rockets hit fast. Fixing takes long," Oleh said in limited but forceful English.

The U.S. has sent Ukraine some Patriot missile systems, and said last week it would give more after entreaties from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The Associated Press on Thursday visited a plant owned by DTEK, the country's biggest private energy supplier, days after a cruise-missile attack left parts of it a mess of smashed glass, shattered bricks and twisted metal. The coal-fired plant is one of four DTEK power stations struck on the same day last week.

The AP was given access on the condition that the location of the facility, technical details of the damage and workers' full names are not published due to security concerns.

During the visit, State Emergency Service workers in hard hats and harnesses clambered atop the twisted roof of a vast building, assessing the damage and occasionally dislodging chunks of debris with a thunderous clang.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba told Foreign Policy magazine that half of the country's energy system has been damaged by Russian attacks.

DTEK says it has lost 80% of its electricity-generating capacity in almost 180 aerial attacks since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. It estimates that repairing all the damaged plants would take between six months and two years — even if there are no more strikes.

Shift supervisor Ruslan was on duty in the operations room when the air alarm sounded. He sent his crew to a basement shelter but remained at his post when the blast struck only meters (yards) away.

He rushed out to darkness, dust and fire. He said he wasn't scared because "I knew what I needed to do" — make sure his team was OK and then try to help put out the flames.

Russia pummeled Ukraine's energy infrastructure to devastating effect during the "blackout winter" of 2022-23. In March it launched a new wave of attacks, one of which completely destroyed the Trypilska power plant near Kyiv, one of the country's biggest.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has framed the attacks as retaliation for Ukrainian strikes on Russian oil refineries.

Oleh said the Russians are "learning all the time" and adapting their tactics. Initially they targeted transformers that distribute power; now they aim for the power-generating equipment itself, with increasing accuracy. The Russians also are sending growing numbers of missiles and exploding drones to exhaust Ukraine's air defenses, and striking the same targets repeatedly.

DTEK executive director Dmytro Sakharuk said in March that out of 10 units the company had repaired after earlier strikes, two-thirds had been hit again.

More Russian missiles have been getting through in recent months as Ukraine awaited new supplies from allies, including a \$61 billion package from the U.S. that was held up for months by wrangling in Congress. It was finally approved in April, but it could be weeks or months before all the new weapons and ammunition arrives.

Ukraine's energy firms have all but exhausted their finances, equipment and spare parts fixing the damage Russia has already wrought. The country's power plants urgently need specialist equipment that Ukraine can no longer make at sufficient speed and scale.

Some 51 DTEK employees have been wounded in attacks since 2022, and three have been killed. Staff

say they keep working despite the danger because they know how crucial their work is.

Machine operator Dmytro, who was on shift during the recent attack and took shelter in the basement, said that when he emerged, "my soul was bleeding when I saw the scale of the destruction."

He thought of the many people who had poured heart and soul into building the mammoth power plant. "This was destroyed in a few seconds, in an instant," he said.

Dmytro, who worked at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant before it was seized by Russia, said he would continue to show up for work every day, "as long as I'm able."

"It's our duty towards the country," he said

Here's what's on the table for Israel and Hamas in the latest cease-fire talks

By SAMY MAGDY and DREW CALLISTER Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Israel and Hamas appear to be seriously negotiating an end to the war in Gaza and the return of Israeli hostages. A leaked truce proposal hints at compromises by both sides after months of stalemated talks.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken this week praised Israel for offering what he described as significant concessions and saying "the time is now" for Hamas to seal the deal. Hamas leaders, meanwhile, say they are reviewing the proposal in a "positive spirit" and sending a team to Egypt in the coming days to continue the talks.

Here's what we know so far about the current proposal, confirmed by Egyptian and Hamas officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss behind-the-scenes negotiations.

WHERE THE TWO SIDES STAND

Israeli leaders are weighing whether to accept a deal that would delay or prevent their planned ground invasion of the southern Gaza city of Rafah — a scenario that falls short of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's pledges of "total victory" and the destruction of Hamas.

Hamas' militant leaders must decide if giving up the hostages, the group's biggest bargaining chip, is worth securing a long-term truce but not necessarily a permanent end to the war.

The plan offered by Egyptian mediators aims to stave off Israel's Rafah offensive, which the U.S. says would have devastating consequences for over a million displaced Palestinians crowded against the border with Egypt. The Egyptians have also warned Israel against the operation, fearing a flood of Palestinian refugees driven into its territory.

DE-ESCALATE IN PHASES

The initial stage of the deal would last for 40 days. Hamas would start by releasing female civilian hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

After this first batch, Israeli troops would withdraw from a coastal road in Gaza and head inland to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid. This would also allow displaced civilians to return to their homes in the northern Gaza Strip. Hamas would provide a list of hostages who are still alive during that time. Israel estimates that Hamas is holding about 100 hostages and the remains of 30 others either killed in the Oct. 7 Hamas attack that sparked the war or who have died in captivity.

Within the third week, both sides would start indirect negotiations that aim to restore permanent calm. Three weeks into the first phase, Israeli troops would withdraw from central Gaza.

NEXT STEPS TOWARD PEACE

The second six-week phase would seek to finalize arrangements for a permanent calm, the release of all remaining hostages held by Hamas, both civilians and soldiers, in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners. The soldier hostages would not be released before the start of the calm.

The third and final stage would include the release of the remains of deceased hostages still in Gaza, more prisoners held by Israel, and the start of a five-year reconstruction plan. The plan says that Hamas would agree not to rebuild its military arsenal.

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STICKING POINTS

Both sides want to end the war on their own terms.

Hamas leaders have for months refused anything short of a full Israeli pullout from the Gaza Strip and a permanent end to the fighting. Hamas negotiators will be seeking clarification on these issues when they return to Cairo.

Israel wants to see all remaining hostages home safe, with Hamas and other militant groups crushed on the battlefield and expelled from power in Gaza — unable to launch another attack like the one on Oct. 7 that sparked the war.

Israel says the Rafah invasion is critical for these goals. Netanyahu says Israel will invade the town with or without a hostage deal.

Netanyahu also faces heavy domestic pressure. Thousands of people have joined weekly demonstrations calling on him to reach a hostage deal immediately. At the same time, hard-liners in his Cabinet have threatened to bring down the government if he ends the war.

The Biden administration, which provides Israel crucial military and diplomatic support, says it opposes a Rafah invasion unless Israel provides a “credible” plan for protecting civilians there.

POST-WAR UNCERTAINTY

It is not clear whether the cease-fire proposal addresses key questions about what happens in Gaza once the current round of fighting ends.

The United States has called for a plan that includes a return of the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority, which was ousted from Gaza by Hamas in 2007 and now administers parts of the occupied West Bank.

The Biden administration seeks eventual Palestinian governance in Gaza and the West Bank as a precursor to Palestinian statehood. Netanyahu and his right-wing government reject a role for the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and say they will never allow a Palestinian state.

Israel wants open-ended freedom of action for its military in Gaza, while the Biden administration says it won't accept a return of Israeli military occupation of the Gaza Strip.

It also remains unclear who will run Gaza during the five-year reconstruction phase, what will happen to Hamas during that time and who will pay for the daunting job of rebuilding.

The stakes were underscored in a new U.N. report Thursday that estimated damage caused by the war in Gaza at over \$18.5 billion. It said it would take until 2040 to rebuild all of the homes destroyed in nearly seven months of Israeli bombardment and ground offensives. Gaza was already grappling with a 45% unemployment rate before the war, according to the U.N. Development Program.

Hamas is sending a delegation to Egypt for further cease-fire talks in the latest sign of progress

By BASSEM MROUE, LEE KEATH and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Hamas said Thursday that it was sending a delegation to Egypt for further cease-fire talks, in a new sign of progress in attempts by international mediators to hammer out an agreement between Israel and the militant group to end the war in Gaza.

After months of stop-and-start negotiations, the cease-fire efforts appear to have reached a critical stage, with Egyptian and American mediators reporting signs of compromise in recent days. But chances for the deal remain entangled with the key question of whether Israel will accept an end to the war without reaching its stated goal of destroying Hamas.

The stakes in the cease-fire negotiations were made clear in a new U.N. report that said if the Israel-Hamas war stops today, it will still take until 2040 to rebuild all the homes that have been destroyed by nearly seven months of Israeli bombardment and ground offensives in Gaza. It warned that the impact of the damage to the economy will set back development for generations and will only get worse with every month fighting continues.

The proposal that U.S. and Egyptian mediators have put to Hamas — apparently with Israel's acceptance

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— sets out a three-stage process that would bring an immediate six-week cease-fire and partial release of Israeli hostages, but also negotiations over a “permanent calm” that includes some sort of Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, according to an Egyptian official. Hamas is seeking guarantees for a full Israeli withdrawal and complete end to the war.

Hamas officials have sent mixed signals about the proposal in recent days. But on Thursday, its supreme leader, Ismail Haniyeh, said in a statement that he had spoken to Egypt’s intelligence chief and “stressed the positive spirit of the movement in studying the cease-fire proposal.”

The statement said that Hamas negotiators would travel to Cairo “to complete the ongoing discussions with the aim of working forward for an agreement.” Haniyeh said he had also spoken to the prime minister of Qatar, another key mediator in the process.

The brokers are hopeful that the deal will bring an end to a conflict that has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, caused widespread destruction and plunged the territory into a humanitarian crisis. They also hope a deal will avert an Israeli attack on Rafah, where more than half of Gaza’s 2.3 million people have sought shelter after fleeing battle zones elsewhere in the territory.

If Israel does agree to end the war in return for a full hostage release, it would be a major turnaround. Since Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack stunned Israel, its leaders have vowed not to stop their bombardment and ground offensives until the militant group is destroyed. They also say Israel must keep a military presence in Gaza and security control after the war to ensure Hamas doesn’t rebuild.

Publicly at least, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to insist that is the only acceptable endgame.

He has vowed that even if a cease-fire is reached, Israel will eventually attack Rafah, which he says is Hamas’ last stronghold in Gaza. He repeated his determination to do so in talks Wednesday with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was in Israel on a regional tour to push the deal through.

The agreement’s immediate fate hinges on whether Hamas will accept uncertainty over the final phases to bring the initial six-week pause in fighting — and at least postpone what it is feared would be a devastating assault on Rafah.

Egypt has been privately assuring Hamas that the deal will mean a total end to the war. But the Egyptian official said Hamas says the text’s language is too vague and wants it to specify a complete Israeli pullout from all of Gaza. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to talk about the internal deliberations.

On Wednesday evening, however, the news looked less positive as Osama Hamdan, a top Hamas official, expressed skepticism, saying the group’s initial position was “negative.” Speaking to Hezbollah’s Al-Manar TV, he said that talks were still ongoing but would stop if Israel invades Rafah.

Blinken hiked up pressure on Hamas to accept, saying Israel had made “very important” compromises. “There’s no time for further haggling. The deal is there,” Blinken said Wednesday before leaving for the U.S.

An Israeli airstrike, meanwhile, killed at least five people, including a child, in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza. The bodies were seen and counted by Associated Press journalists at a hospital.

The war broke out on Oct. 7 when Hamas militants broke into southern Israel and killed over 1,200 people, mostly Israelis, taking around 250 others hostage, some released during a cease-fire on November.

The Israel-Hamas war was sparked by the Oct. 7 raid into southern Israel in which militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Hamas is believed to still hold around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

Since then, Israel’s campaign in Gaza has wreaked vast destruction and brought a humanitarian disaster, with several hundred thousand Palestinians in northern Gaza facing imminent famine, according to the U.N. More than 80% of the population has been driven from their homes.

The “productive basis of the economy has been destroyed” and poverty is rising sharply among Palestinians, according to the report released Thursday by the United Nations Development Program and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

It said that in 2024, the entire Palestinian economy — including both Gaza and the West Bank — has so far contracted 25.8%. If the war continues, the loss will reach a “staggering” 29% by July, it said. The

West Bank economy has been hit by Israel's decision to cancel the work permits for tens of thousands of laborers who depended on jobs inside Israel.

"These new figures warn that the suffering in Gaza will not end when the war does," UNDP administrator Achim Steiner said. He warned of a "serious development crisis that jeopardizes the future of generations to come."

United Methodists remove anti-gay language from their official teachings on societal issues

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — United Methodist delegates on Thursday removed a 52-year-old declaration from their official social teachings that deemed "the practice of homosexuality ... incompatible with Christian teaching" — part of a wider series of historic reversals of the denomination's longstanding disapproval of LGBTQ activity.

The historic vote came as delegates also approved a new definition of marriage as a covenant between "two people of faith" while recognizing the couple may or may not involve a man and a woman. That replaces an exclusively heterosexual definition of marriage and followed a debate that exposed tensions between some U.S. and international delegates.

The 523-161 vote to approve a section of the church's Revised Social Principles took place at the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in the penultimate day of their 11-day legislative gathering in Charlotte.

It came a day after the General Conference removed its longstanding ban on "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" from being ordained or appointed as ministers. Step by step, delegates have been removing anti-LGBTQ language throughout their official documents.

But the marriage definition was approved only after debate and a compromise amendment — one of the few instances of open debate during this otherwise overwhelmingly progressive conference.

"God designed marriage to be between a man and a woman," said Nimia Peralta from the Northwest Philippines. While the conference earlier approved a regionalization plan enabling different parts of the global church to adapt rules to their local contexts, "God's word can never be regionalized," she said.

But the Rev. James Howell of Western North Carolina applauded the new language.

"Cynics and young adults will not listen to us talk about Jesus if we say we do not condone people they love and care about," Howell said. "Friends, it's time."

The Rev. Kalaba Chali, based in Kansas, said the principles are general enough without forcing people in different cultural contexts "to do things the same way."

The approval came only after an amendment offered by lay delegate Molly Mwayera of East Zimbabwe, who noted that many African countries do not allow for same-sex marriage. After extended wordsmithing, the assembly settled on an amendment with a parenthetical clause that affirmed marriage as a sacred covenant bringing "two people of faith (adult man and woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age) into union."

It's the UMC's first legislative gathering since 2019, one that features its most progressive slate of delegates in memory due to the departure of many conservatives from the denomination. More than 7,600 mostly conservative congregations in the United States — one quarter of the denomination's American total — disaffiliated because the UMC essentially stopped enforcing its bans on same-sex marriage and LGBTQ ordination.

A temporary window enabled American churches to leave with their properties, normally held by the denomination, under more favorable than normal terms. While the conference voted against extending that window to international churches, the conference votes could still prompt departures of some international churches through different means — particularly in Africa, where conservative sexual values prevail and where same-sex activity is criminalized in some countries.

After the vote, contrasting gatherings were held nearby outside the Charlotte Convention Center — a

celebratory gathering of LGBTQ people and their allies at one end of a long courtyard, a defiant gathering of prayer and song by dozens of African delegates who opposed the changes.

"We are deeply devastated now to be part of a denomination that will contradict the Bible's teaching on marriage and sexual morality," said the Rev. Jerry Kulah, of the conservative advocacy group Africa Initiative. He said African conferences will have to decide their future, but he contended the denomination was "willing to lose Africans and Africa to fulfill this progressive agenda."

Some African delegates have spoken in support of the regionalization proposal, which can allow church regions to maintain their bans on same-sex marriage and LGBTQ ordination even as American churches go without them.

The progressive momentum of the General Conference was evident from the vote Thursday. They voted on the last of a series of approvals of a wholesale rewrite of the denomination's Social Principles — a non-binding but influential compendium of the denomination's social stances on everything from war and peace to the environment and family relations.

The new version no longer includes the clause: "The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching." It had also urged members not to condemn gays and lesbians.

The old version said sexual relations are "affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage."

The new version omits this phrase and describes "human sexuality as a sacred gift" and a "healthy and natural part of life that is expressed in wonderfully diverse ways." It doesn't say anything about restricting sexual activity to marriage. It does say people have the right to consent to sex and condemns sexual harassment and exploitation and opposes pornography as "destructive."

The new version calls for human rights for all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and other racial, ethnic and gender categories.

Thursday's change is particularly significant because the "incompatible" clause dates back to the beginning of the 52-year-old debate on LGBTQ issues within one of the nation's largest Protestant denominations. The phrasing was adopted on the floor of the 1972 General Conference via an amendment proposed by a delegate, added to the original draft statement that had said "persons of homosexual orientation are persons of sacred worth."

The denomination had been revising and adding to the Social Principles for decades; this amounts to the first wholesale rewrite in many years. Other revisions were approved earlier this week.

The drafters chose general language because the denomination spans countries and cultures, said John Hill, interim general secretary at the Board of Church and Society, at a news conference earlier this week.

"Our hope was that statements that could speak theologically to these matters, but not to any specific context, could then be applied across the context of the church," he said

I-95 in Connecticut will close for days after fiery crash damages bridge, governor says

By SUSAN HAIGH and PAT EATON-ROBB Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — The major traffic artery linking New England with New York will be closed in Connecticut for days after a tanker fire damaged a bridge over Interstate 95, Gov. Ned Lamont said Thursday.

The tanker truck filled with gasoline burst into flames in a three-vehicle crash Thursday on I-95 in southwest Connecticut, closing the East Coast's main north-south highway and causing major traffic jams. While Lamont said there were no serious injuries in the 5:30 a.m. accident in Norwalk, the crash caused damage to the bridge above it.

"The heat from the burning fuel compromised some of the bridge, so that bridge is going to have to come down and that demolition is going to start first thing tomorrow morning," Lamont said at a briefing Thursday evening in Hartford.

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He said the hope is to reopen the interstate by Monday morning.

Norwalk Mayor Harry Rilling said his city's schools will be closed on Friday. It's unclear whether they'll reopen Monday. He urged local employers to consider allowing employees to work from home on Friday, if possible, or use the MetroNorth commuter rail. Additional trains are being added to the rail line, officials said.

While the bridge was less than 10 years old, "the damage was pretty severe due to the amount of gasoline that was in the tanker ignited directly underneath the bridge structure," Connecticut Department of Transportation Commissioner Garrett Eucalitto said. "The steel did begin to overheat and warp."

The tanker had been carrying a load of about 8,500 gallons (about 32,000 liters) when it crashed beneath the Fairfield Avenue bridge, officials said. The overpass did not appear in danger of collapsing, said Scott Hill, chief engineer for the Connecticut Department of Transportation.

Eucalitto said it's unsafe to allow any traffic to pass underneath the bridge in either direction, so the entire bridge, which has beams that cross both spans of highway, has to be removed.

Large equipment was being brought to Connecticut Thursday evening to complete the demolition, which is expected to begin around 3 a.m. on Friday. Lamont said the work could take 24 hours or longer to complete. After that, the roadway may need to be repaved before it can reopen.

It will likely take about a year to replace the bridge, a major artery for the city of more than 91,000 people. Lamont said he is hoping to receive federal reimbursement to cover the cost.

"I'm glad everyone is OK," Lisa Brinton, who lives south of I-95, told Hearst Connecticut Media. "My concern is the after effect. Norwalk is divided in half by 95 and I drive over Fairfield Avenue bridge everyday."

The cause of the crash remains under police investigation and no charges have been filed.

About 160,000 vehicles travel that portion of I-95 in both directions daily, Eucalitto said.

Traffic was backed up for dozens of miles during the morning rush hour, and lengthy delays remained in the area into Thursday evening and were expected through the weekend. Slow-moving detours were set up, taking traffic off the highway and around the accident scene. The crash left other highways and secondary roads in gridlock. The major alternate route in the area, the Merritt Parkway, cannot be used by trucks because the underpasses on that highway are too low.

Text alerts were sent to residents of Connecticut, New York and New Jersey, and trucking companies who use the section of I-95 were notified to find alternative routes and means of travel, he said. U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg also was notified.

"I know what an incredible inconvenience this is for people and all I can ask you to do is stay away from that area as best you can," Lamont said during an earlier briefing in Hartford. "The traffic jams are horrendous."

Crews offloaded about 4,000 gallons (about 15,142 liters) of gasoline that was unburnt and remained on the tanker. Utility crews were also working to replace downed wires.

Environmental crews worked to clean up gasoline and firefighting foam. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection said the runoff was contained to a retention pond and did not make it into the Norwalk River or the city's harbor.

The accident was reminiscent of last year's deadly accident in Philadelphia along I-95 when a tractor-trailer carrying gasoline lost control and caught fire, destroying a section of the highway.

The crash also came just over a year after a similar wreck on I-95 in Connecticut that forced the closure of the highway.

In April 2023, another fuel truck caught fire after colliding with a stopped car on the Gold Star Memorial Bridge between New London and Groton. The fuel truck driver was killed. The crash shut down the southbound side of the bridge for hours, while the northbound side was closed briefly. The driver of the car was recently charged with negligent homicide.

Maryland officials release timeline, cost estimate, for rebuilding bridge

By BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) — Maryland plans to rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge in just over four years at an estimated cost between \$1.7 billion and \$1.9 billion, a state transportation official said Thursday.

The state plans to build a new span by fall of 2028, said David Broughton, a spokesperson for the Maryland Department of Transportation. He said the cost estimate is preliminary, and detailed engineering specifics have not been confirmed.

As salvage efforts continue, authorities also announced late Wednesday they had recovered the body of a fifth person who was missing after the bridge's March 26 collapse, which shut down the port of Baltimore, one of the busiest ports in the country.

Six members of a roadwork crew plunged to their deaths when a container ship lost power and crashed into one of the bridge's supporting columns. The Key Bridge Response Unified Command announced that the victim found Wednesday was identified as Miguel Angel Luna Gonzalez, 49, of Glen Burnie, Maryland. All of the victims were Latino immigrants who came to the United States from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.

"We continue to pray for Miguel Angel Luna Gonzalez, his family and all those who love him, acknowledging the anguish they have experienced since the Key Bridge collapsed," Gov. Wes Moore said in a statement Thursday. "We pray for comfort, we pray for healing, and we pray for peace in knowing that their loved one has finally come home."

Salvage teams found one of the missing construction vehicles Wednesday and notified the Maryland State Police, officials said. State police investigators and Maryland Transportation Authority Police officers and the FBI responded to the scene and recovered the body inside a red truck. The state police underwater recovery team and crime scene unit also assisted.

Meanwhile, the broker for the bridge's insurance policy confirmed Thursday that a \$350 million payout will be made to the state of Maryland in what is expected to be the first of many payouts related to the collapse.

Chubb, the company that insured the bridge, is preparing to make the \$350 million payment, according to WTW, the broker. Douglas Menelly, a spokesperson for WTW, on Thursday confirmed plans for the payout, which was first reported by The Wall Street Journal. Chubb did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday.

The Maryland Transportation Authority said Thursday that the state's treasurer filed a claim on the day of the bridge's collapse "against our \$350 million property policy and put on notice our \$150 million liability policy first tier carrier on behalf of MDTA."

"We expect the full property policy to be paid very shortly," the agency said in a news release.

Maryland transportation officials noted that the state's estimates for the cost to rebuild the bridge are in line with similar projects of this scale and complexity. Federal funding, insurance proceeds and other reimbursements will bring a variety of resources toward the rebuild and recovery effort, the officials said, and the state is pursuing other recovery options to minimize net cost to taxpayers and toll customers.

The Dali container ship has been stationary amid the wreckage since the collapse, but crews plan to refloat and remove the ship, allowing more maritime traffic to resume through Baltimore's port. Officials expect to have it removed by May 10, according to a Port of Baltimore news release.

Salvage and demolition crews were still working around the clock to clear wreckage from the collapse site. They're now focused primarily on freeing the Dali from a massive steel span that came crashing down on the ship's bow.

That will allow the ship to be refloated and guided back into the Port of Baltimore. It will also allow most maritime traffic to resume through the busy East Coast port.

On Thursday morning, crews were preparing for a controlled demolition that will break down the largest remaining span and send it tumbling into the water. Then a massive hydraulic grabber will lift the resulting sections of steel onto barges.

The hydraulic grabber, which officials have called the largest in the country, was also in motion Thursday morning. Moving ever so slowly, the giant claw descended into the depths of the Patapsco River and emerged with a steel beam in its trusses. It was operating in tandem with the Chesapeake 1000, one of the largest cranes on the Eastern Seaboard.

Faceless people, invisible hands: New Army video aims to lure recruits for psychological operations

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

FORT LIBERTY, N.C. (AP) — The video is unsettling, with haunting images of faceless people, fire and soldiers. The voiceover is a cascade of recognizable historical voices as the screen pulses cryptic messages touting the power of words, ideas and “invisible hands.”

Hints of its origin are tucked into frames as they flash by: PSYWAR. The Army’s psychological warfare soldiers are using their brand of mental combat to bring in what the service needs: recruits. And if you find the video intriguing, you may be the Army’s target audience as it works to enlist soldiers to join its Special Operations Command.

Released in the early morning hours Thursday, the video is the second provocative recruiting ad that, in itself, exemplifies the kind of work the psyop soldiers do to influence public opinion and wage the war of words overseas. Called “Ghost in the Machine 2,” it is coming out two years after the inaugural video was quietly posted on the unit’s YouTube site and generated a firestorm of online chatter.

“It’s a recruiting video,” said the Army major who created it, speaking with The Associated Press before the release. “Someone who watches it and thinks, wow, that was effective, how was it constructed — that’s the kind of creative mindset we’re looking for.”

The soldier, a member of the 8th Psychological Operations Group based at Fort Liberty, North Carolina, also made the first video. He asked that his name not be used to protect his identity, as is common among special forces troops.

Psyop units are used for an array of missions that can range from simple leaflet drops to more sophisticated propaganda and messaging aimed at deceiving the enemy or shaping opinion on foreign soil. It’s illegal for the U.S. military to conduct psychological operations on Americans.

Army Special Operations Command leaders and special forces recruiters hope that a new stream of chatter inspired by the video will help bring in recruits to an often unseen and little known job.

“From a tactical level, the psyop mission is extremely hard to show and tell,” said Lt. Col. Steve Crowe, commander of the Special Forces Recruiting Battalion. And it’s the job in Army special forces that recruiters say is the hardest to fill.

Across the military, the armed services have been struggling to meet enlistment goals, with most falling far short of their targets in recent years. The Army, which is the largest service, has had the most trouble, missing its goal by about 15,000 soldiers for the past two years. But most of the services say things are improving this year.

The Army’s Special Operations recruiters who recruit from already-serving soldiers say they are making about 75% of their overall goal, which is between 3,000 and 4,000. Of that, they have to bring in about 650 active-duty soldiers to psychological operations per year.

Officials blame the nation’s low unemployment, increased competition from corporate businesses, which can pay more and offer similar benefits, and a sluggish return from several years of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions that prevented recruiters from visiting schools and attending other public events.

Recruiting struggles in Army Special Operations Command have mirrored those of the larger Army. The recruiters said they are responsible for bringing in several types of special forces — the most well-known are the Green Berets and Delta Force, but there are also Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations and the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, known as the Night Stalkers.

The Army has said it intends to trim the number of psyop soldiers, but still has struggled to fill the ranks. Perhaps the most celebrated psyop was in World War II, when the so-called U.S. Ghost Army outwitted

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the Germans using inflatable tanks, radio trickery, costumes and impersonations. In what was dubbed Operation Viersen, the soldiers used the inflatables, sound trucks and phony headquarters to draw German units away from the point on the Rhine River where the 9th Army was actually crossing. Several of the last surviving members of the unit were recently awarded the Congressional Gold Medal at a ceremony in Washington.

These days, psyop activities are often classified. But one of the last U.S. service members to die in Afghanistan — killed by a suicide bomber at Abbey Gate during the chaotic evacuation in 2021 — was a psyop soldier: Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Knauss, 23, of Corryton, Tennessee. His task that day was largely crowd control and influence, by using a bullhorn to communicate with the frantic throngs of Afghans and get them moving in the right direction.

A more recent example would be assistance to Ukraine. U.S. psychological operations soldiers have advised and assisted Ukrainian troops in their efforts to counter Russian disinformation campaigns since 2014. After the Russian invasion in February 2022, Ukrainian forces used a range of tactics — including leaflets and social media — to entice Russian troops to surrender and tell them how and where to give themselves up.

About half of the psychological operations troops are young people who join when they enlist. The rest are recruited from within the Army's existing ranks. The command's recruiters focus on the internal audience, which has its own challenges.

A growing hurdle, according to Crowe and Army Maj. Jim Maicke, executive officer of the Special Forces recruiting battalion, is that these days regular soldiers across the Army have less interaction with special operations forces than they did during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

In those conflicts, soldiers often worked side-by-side with commandos, or were deployed at the same bases and had a better view of what they did.

"Business was generally pretty good. And the reason, we believe, was all the interaction that was happening between special operations and conventional forces," said Crowe, adding that soldiers "got to see behind the curtain, how we operate. We don't have that anymore."

It's particularly difficult for psyops soldiers, whose work is often less visible than that of the more celebrated Army commandos and not always understood.

"We're all nerds for sure," said the Army major who created the ad. "But we're all nerds in different ways." Usually, those who are drawn to the job are "planners," he said. "They're writers, they're great thinkers. They're idea people."

Often, he said, they are creative, such as artists and illustrators, but others are tech experts who can bring those ideas to life in videos or online messaging.

The new "Ghost in the Machine" video is aimed at that audience.

Recruiters say the first video was successful.

"I think what he does with 'Ghost in the Machine' is it tells you what psychological operations is, and shows you it, without telling you in words," said Crowe. "You watch the video and you're like, okay, this is how I'll influence and change behavior."

On a recent recruiting trip to the Citadel, the Military College of South Carolina, the recruiters brought a psyop officer and a civil affairs officer along to speak with the cadets.

"We had a very limited amount of time to engage about 450 cadets," said Maicke, a graduate of the college. "And the psyop officer chose to give a brief introduction and then immediately turn on the 'Ghost in the Machine' video. He ended with, 'if anyone has any questions about this, I'm right over here,' and business was booming."

In fact, about six months after the first video was released, the command began surveying soldiers who applied for the psyop mission and got into the assessment and selection course. More than 51% said the video had a medium to high level of influence on their decision to try out for the job, recruiters said.

That, said the Army major, is the goal of the second video, which ends with a crescendo of music, shots of marching military troops with their arms raised in surrender, and a question streaming across the screen: "Do you believe in the power of words and ideas. Will You. We Believe." The final frames say PSYWAR

and show the website: goarmysof.com.

Senators want limits on the government's use of facial recognition technology for airport screening

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bipartisan group of senators is pushing for restrictions on the use of facial recognition technology by the Transportation Security Administration, saying they are concerned about travelers' privacy and civil liberties.

In a letter on Thursday, the group of 14 lawmakers called on Senate leaders to use the upcoming reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration as a vehicle to limit TSA's use of the technology so Congress can put in place some oversight.

"This technology poses significant threats to our privacy and civil liberties, and Congress should prohibit TSA's development and deployment of facial recognition tools until rigorous congressional oversight occurs," the senators wrote.

The effort, led by Sens. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., John Kennedy, R-La., and Roger Marshall, R-Kan., "would halt facial recognition technology at security checkpoints, which has proven to improve security effectiveness, efficiency, and the passenger experience," TSA said in a statement.

The technology is currently in use at 84 airports around the country and is planned to expand in the coming years to the roughly 430 covered by TSA.

The FAA reauthorization is one of the last must-pass bills of this Congress. The agency regulates airlines and aircraft manufacturers and manages the nation's airspace.

TSA, which is part of the Homeland Security Department, has been rolling out the facial recognition technology at select airports in a pilot project. Travelers put their driver's license into a slot that reads the card or they place their passport photo against a card reader. Then they look at a camera on a screen about the size of an iPad that captures their image and compares it to their ID. The technology is checking to make sure that travelers at the airport match the ID they present and that the identification is real. A TSA officer signs off on the screening.

The agency says the system improves accuracy of identity verification without slowing passenger speeds at checkpoints. The technology is not being used as a surveillance tool to compile a database or monitor people in and around the checkpoints, according to the TSA. It says the photos and IDs are deleted after the passenger goes through the checkpoint.

Passengers can opt out, although David Pekoske, the TSA administrator, said last year that eventually biometrics would be required because they are more effective and efficient. He gave no timeline.

Critics have raised questions about how the data is collected, who has access to it, and what happens if there is a hack. Privacy advocates are concerned about possible bias in the algorithms and say it is not clear enough to passengers that they do not have to submit to facial recognition.

"It is clear that we are at a critical juncture," the senators wrote. "The scope of the government's use of facial recognition on Americans will expand exponentially under TSA's plans with little to no public discourse or congressional oversight."

Man who bragged that he 'fed' an officer to the mob of Capitol rioters gets nearly 5 years in prison

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Georgia business owner who bragged that he "fed" a police officer to a mob of rioters storming the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, was sentenced on Thursday to nearly five years in prison for his repeated attacks on law enforcement during the insurrection.

Jack Wade Whitton struck an officer with a metal crutch and dragged him — head first and face down — into the crowd on the Capitol's Lower West Terrace. Whitton later boasted in a text message that he

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"fed him to the people."

Roughly 20 minutes later, Whitton tried to pull a second officer into the crowd, prosecutors say. He also kicked at, threatened and threw a construction pylon at officers trying to hold off the mob of then-President Donald Trump's supporters.

"You're gonna die tonight!" he shouted at police after striking an officer's riot shield.

Whitton, of Locust Grove, Georgia, expressed remorse for his "horrible" actions on Jan. 6 before U.S. District Judge Rudolph Contreras sentenced him to four years and nine months in prison. The 33-year-old will get credit for the three years that he has been jailed since his arrest.

"I tell you with confidence: I have changed," Whitton told the judge.

Whitton, who pleaded guilty to an assault charge last year, told the judge that he has never been a "political person."

"I've never been a troublemaker. I've always been a hard worker and a law-abiding citizen," he said.

The judge said the videos of Whitton attacking police are "gruesome."

"You really were out of control," the judge told him.

Prosecutors recommended a prison sentence of eight years and one month for Whitton, who owned and operated his own fence building company before his April 2021 arrest.

"Whitton looked for opportunities to attack: In his three documented assaults, he was either a leader or a solitary actor," prosecutors wrote in a court filing.

Videos show that contemporaneous attacks on police by Whitton and a co-defendant, Justin Jersey, "ignited the rageful onslaught of violence that followed" on the Lower West Terrace, prosecutors said.

"As Whitton and Jersey commenced their assaults, the tenor of the crowd audibly changed," they wrote. "Other rioters surged towards the Archway and joined the attack, throwing objects at the officers and striking at them with makeshift weapons such as a hockey stick, a pieces of wood, a flagpole, and a police riot shield."

Whitton was among nine defendants charged in the same attack. Two co-defendants, Logan Barnhart and Jeffrey Sabol, helped Whitton drag an officer into the crowd before other rioters beat the officer with a flagpole and a stolen police baton.

That evening, Whitton texted somebody images of his bloodied hands.

"This is from a bad cop," he wrote. "Yea I fed him to the people. (I don't know) his status. And don't care (to be honest)."

Defense attorney Komron Jon Maknoon said Whitton traveled to Washington to support his girlfriend because she wanted to "witness an historic event" on Jan. 6, when Trump, a Republican, held a rally as Congress was about to certify his 2020 presidential election loss to Joe Biden, a Democrat.

"While his motives were not politically driven, he does possess a genuine love for his country and shares the desire for a free and fair election, much like any other citizen," Maknoon wrote.

The judge previously sentenced seven of Whitton's co-defendants to prison terms ranging from two years and six months to five years and 10 months.

More than 1,350 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the Capitol riot. Over 850 of them have been sentenced, with roughly two-thirds receiving a term of imprisonment ranging from a few days to 22 years.

Also on Thursday, a case was unsealed against a Virginia man charged with attacking police officers and an Associated Press photographer during the riot. David A. Marshall Jr., 57, of Alexandria was arrested Wednesday on assault charges.

Marshall also helped rioters take a ladder, stole an officer's baton and bag and used zip ties to close the Capitol's Memorial Doors, preventing police from opening them, according to an FBI agent's affidavit.

What is at stake in UK local voting ahead of a looming general election

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Millions of voters in England and Wales cast ballots Thursday in an array of local elections amounting to the last big test before a U.K. general election that all indicators suggest will see the Conservative Party ousted from power after 14 years.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will hope he can point to successes, notably in a couple of key mayoral races, to douse talk that the Conservative Party will change leader again before the United Kingdom's main election, which could take place as soon as next month.

On the other hand, Labour Party leader Keir Starmer hopes Thursday's local elections confirm what opinion polls have shown for two years — that Labour is on course for power for the first time since 2010.

"The national context going into these local elections is very good for Labour and very bad for the Conservatives," said Rob Ford, professor of politics at the University of Manchester.

As is often the case in British local elections, the run-up is about expectation management, so any out-performance can be painted as a success.

That's certainly the case with the Conservatives, who are widely predicted to lose around half of the 1,000 seats they are contesting. They have pointed out, for example, that the equivalent elections were held in 2021 when the government of then Prime Minister Boris Johnson was riding high following the rollout of the coronavirus vaccines.

Thursday's elections are important in themselves — voters decide who will run many aspects of their daily lives, such as garbage collection, the state of the roads and local crime prevention measures in the coming years.

But with a general election looming, they will be viewed through a national prism.

Here are five things to know:

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Voters in England and Wales went to the polls for local, mayoral and police and crime commissioner elections.

The voting was the final test of public opinion before the general election, which has to take place by January 2025, but which Sunak, who has the power to decide on the date, has indicated will be in the second half of 2024.

As well as a number of mayoral votes, including in London, where Sadiq Khan is expected to win a third term, there were more than 100 elections to local councils and nearly 40 for local police and crime commissioners.

There was also a special parliamentary election in Blackpool South, a long-time Labour seat that went Conservative in the last election in 2019, when Johnson won a big victory. The results will be announced in the coming days. London's mayoral result isn't due until Saturday.

No elections took place in Scotland or Northern Ireland, the other parts of the U.K.

WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR SUNAK?

Potentially his job. Sunak replaced Liz Truss, who quit after 45 days following a budget of unfunded tax cuts that roiled financial markets and sent borrowing costs for homeowners surging.

Sunak, who warned about the economic implications of Truss' plan, was supposed to be a steady hand after taking the top job in October 2022. If opinion polls are right, he's not improved the Conservatives' ratings, which had even prior to Truss, been battered by the circus surrounding Johnson, who was ousted over a series of ethics scandals.

With the Conservatives seemingly headed for one of their biggest-ever electoral defeats, there's mounting speculation Sunak may face a leadership battle if Thursday's election results are really bad.

Key to his survival could be the mayoral elections in the West Midlands and Tees Valley in the northeast of England. Should Conservative mayors Andy Street and Ben Houchen hold on, he may win some respite from restive lawmakers in his party. Should both lose, he may face trouble.

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IS LABOUR HEADED FOR POWER?

In historical terms, Labour has a mountain to climb, if it's going to form the next government. Its performance in 2019 was its worst since 1935. Starmer has tried to bring the party back to the center of U.K. politics after the five-year leadership of veteran left-winger Jeremy Corbyn.

Starmer's cautious approach has clearly worked if opinion polls are anything to go by. But it's fair to say that enthusiasm levels are far lower than those that heralded the arrival of Tony Blair before the 1997 general election.

That may be partly because of the more challenging economic backdrop, but Starmer, formerly a human rights lawyer, lacks the razzmatazz of his predecessor. Even so, Starmer will hope Labour notches up big wins in areas it lost under Corbyn, in the north of England and in the Midlands.

One point of concern is how many traditionally Labour supporters in Muslim communities fail to vote in protest at the party's stance over the conflict in Gaza.

ARE VOTERS BEING TACTICAL?

One of the contributing factors to Blair's landslide victory in 1997 came from so-called tactical voting, whereby some voters put aside their preferred political party and back whoever they think is most likely to defeat the Conservative candidate.

Tactical voting has reemerged in recent years and could become key in the general election. It usually involves voters sympathetic to Labour in parts of the country, such as southwest England, backing the much smaller Liberal Democrats and Liberal Democrat supporters loaning votes to Labour in the Midlands and the north of England.

Conservative lawmakers across the U.K., even in supposedly safe seats, will be hugely concerned if voters think more tactically.

PINCER FROM THE RIGHT?

The Conservatives don't just face a challenge from the left. Reform UK is trying to outflank it from the right.

Though it is standing in a few seats, Conservatives will worry that support for the party will see Labour and others come through the middle.

Reform UK, which claims to be tougher on issues such as immigration and on Brexit, has said it won't stand aside to give incumbent Conservative lawmakers an easier chance at the general election, as its former incarnation, The Brexit Party, did in 2019. The Blackpool South special election will be particularly interesting on that front.

Today in History: May 3, Margaret Thatcher becomes Britain's first female prime minister

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, May 3, the 124th day of 2024. There are 242 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 3, 1979, Conservative Party leader Margaret Thatcher was chosen to become Britain's first female prime minister as the Tories ousted the incumbent Labour government in parliamentary elections.

On this date:

In 1802, Washington, D.C., was incorporated as a city.

In 1937, Margaret Mitchell won the Pulitzer Prize for her novel, "Gone with the Wind."

In 1947, Japan's postwar constitution took effect.

In 1948, the Supreme Court, in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, ruled that covenants prohibiting the sale of real estate to Blacks or members of other racial groups were legally unenforceable.

In 1960, the Harvey Schmidt-Tom Jones musical "The Fantasticks" began a nearly 42-year run at New York's Sullivan Street Playhouse.

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In 1987, The Miami Herald said its reporters had observed a young woman spending "Friday night and most of Saturday" at a Washington townhouse belonging to Democratic presidential candidate Gary Hart. (The woman was later identified as Donna Rice; the resulting controversy torpedoed Hart's presidential bid.)

In 2006, a federal jury in Alexandria, Virginia, rejected the death penalty for al-Qaida conspirator Zacarias Moussaoui (zak-uh-REE'-uhs moo-SOW'-ee), deciding he should spend life in prison for his role in 9/11.

In 2009, Mexican President Felipe Calderon told state television that a nationwide shutdown and an aggressive informational campaign appeared to have helped curtail an outbreak of swine flu in Mexico.

In 2011, Chicago's Derrick Rose became at age 22 the NBA's youngest MVP.

In 2015, two gunmen were shot and killed by a police officer in Garland, Texas, after they opened fire outside a purposely provocative contest for cartoon depictions of the Prophet Muhammad.

In 2016, in a stunning triumph for a political outsider, Donald Trump all but clinched the Republican presidential nomination with a resounding victory in Indiana that knocked rival Ted Cruz out of the race.

In 2018, a federal grand jury in Detroit indicted former Volkswagen CEO Martin Winterkorn on charges stemming from the company's diesel emissions cheating scandal. (Under Germany's constitution, he could not be extradited to the U.S. to face charges.)

In 2021, Bill and Melinda Gates said they were divorcing after 27 years of marriage; the Microsoft co-founder and his wife said they would continue to work together at the world's largest private charitable foundation.

In 2022, President Joe Biden blasted as "radical" a leaked Supreme Court draft opinion throwing out the Roe v. Wade abortion rights ruling after 50 years. Chief Justice John Roberts said he had ordered an investigation into what he called an "egregious breach of trust."

Today's Birthdays: Singer Frankie Valli is 90. Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, is 81. Sports announcer Greg Gumbel is 78. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., is 75. Pop singer Mary Hopkin is 74. Singer Christopher Cross is 73. Rock musician David Ball (Soft Cell) is 65. Country singer Shane Minor is 56. Actor Amy Ryan is 56. Actor Bobby Cannavale (ka-nuh-VAL'-ee) is 54. Music and film producer-actor Damon Dash is 53. Country musician John Driskell Hopkins (Zac Brown Band) is 53. Country-rock musician John Neff is 53. Actor Marsha Stephanie-Blake is 49. TV personality Willie Geist (TV: "Today") is 49. Actor Christina Hendricks is 49. Actor Dule (doo-LAY') Hill is 49. Country singer Eric Church is 47. Actor Tanya Wright is 46. Dancer Cheryl Burke is 40. Soul singer Michael Kiwanuka is 37. Actor Zoe De Grand Maison is 29. Rapper Desiigner is 27.