

Groton Daily Independent

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Postponed yesterday to May 20th: Girls Golf at Olive Grove Golf Course, 10 a.m.

Tuesday, May 7

Senior Menu: Creamed chicken, biscuit, vegetable Catalina blend pears, tapioca pudding.
School Breakfast: Waffles.
School Lunch: Chicken fajitas, Spanish rice.
Bramble Zoo Presentation/Assembly at Groton Area Elementary, 9:30 a.m.-1:45 p.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent
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“When you forgive, you in no way change the past--but you sure do change the future.”

-Bernard Meltzer



The Pantry at Groton Community Center, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Baseball, Softball, T-Ball Parent meeting at the Groton Community Center, 7:30 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran Vacation Bible School, 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Wednesday, May 8

Scalloped potato with ham, mixed vegetables, sunset salad, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Taco burgers tater tots.

High School Baseball in Groton hosting Redfield, 5:30 .m.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

Emmanuel Lutheran Vacation Bible School, 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.; League at church, go to Alleviate, 5:30 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour 9:30 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**[™]

The Israeli military yesterday began its long-planned ground operation in Gaza's southern city of Rafah, where roughly half of the enclave's 2.3 million people have been sheltering.

The 2024 Pulitzer Prize winners were announced yesterday, with the recognition for public service awarded to ProPublica for its coverage of the US Supreme Court, resulting in the court's first-ever adoption of a code of conduct.

The 68th Eurovision Song Contest begins today from Sweden, with the country hosting for its seventh time (Peacock, 3 pm ET). The competition is the world's most-watched annual music event with roughly 160 million viewers and features 37 acts, all of whom are European except Australia and Israel.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Miss USA 2023 Noelia Voigt relinquishes crown, citing her mental health; Miss USA organization to name a successor soon.

Statues of civil rights leader Daisy Bates and musician Johnny Cash to replace existing 100-year-old statues representing Arkansas at the US Capitol.

San Antonio Spurs' Victor Wembanyama becomes NBA's sixth-ever unanimous Rookie of the Year. NBA postseason continues.

Science & Technology

Groundbreaking Alzheimer's study links some cases of the disease with duplicate copies of the APOE4 gene; marks the most conclusive evidence of genetic causes for Alzheimer's, may represent 15% to 20% of cases.

New ultrasound imaging technique allows high-resolution of microscopic blood vessels in the heart, may lead to better diagnosis of cardiovascular disease.

Boeing delays first crewed launch of Starliner spacecraft to the International Space Station due to issue with an oxygen valve; a new launch date hasn't been announced as of this writing.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +1.0%, Dow +0.5%, Nasdaq +1.2%), with investors fueled by a greater chance of interest rate cuts this year.

Free stock trading giant Robinhood announces it has received an enforcement action notice from the US Securities and Exchange Commission over alleged violations of securities laws related to its cryptocurrency unit.

Boeing faces new probe from the Federal Aviation Administration over 787 Dreamliner model; investigation comes after the jet maker revealed its employees may have skipped some inspections and falsified records.

Politics & World Affairs

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) to run for fourth term; Sanders, 82, is second-oldest US senator behind 90-year-old Sen. Chuck Grassley (R, IA). Former President Donald Trump fined additional \$1K for violating gag order in hush money trial, was previously fined \$9K; trial judge warns of jail time for future violations.

Russia detains American soldier on charges of theft, US officials say; soldier, whose identity hasn't been revealed, traveled to Russia on his own while between deployments. Russia announces nuclear weapons drills.

Great Plains, central US brace for supercell thunderstorms capable of producing tornadoes, hail, and damaging winds.

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—Weber—
Landscaping
Greenhouse

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Groton
Hours: M-F 10-6
Sat 10-4 ~ Sun 12-4

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April 29 - May 5, 2024

Welcome back to another Weekly Round[s] Up! This week, I was fortunate to have my son Brian, his wife Kerry and their three kids visiting Washington. They were able to join me at the Capitol on Wednesday morning for breakfast in the Senate Dining Room, a tour



of the Capitol and a tour of the Senate floor. They had a fun week of sightseeing in DC, and I was able to join them at the National Archives and Washington Monument in between my meetings, hearings and briefings this week. We were successful in passing unique legislation this week, which I'll talk about later. More on that and the rest of my week in my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakotans I met with: The South Dakota Snowmobile Association; members of the Independent Community Bankers of South Dakota; Tura Synhorst, a South Dakota member of the American Beverage Association; South Dakota Zero to Three; Brandon Delzer, President of the South Dakota Rural Letter Carriers Association; the South Dakota Telecommunications Association; George Hawkins, South Dakota's 2024 Teacher of the Year; South Dakota Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees; students from Sturgis Brown High School; and South Dakota students participating in the Close Up Foundation's Native Youth Policy Summit.

Visited with South Dakotans from: Aberdeen, Bison, Brookings, Canton, Chamberlain, Clear Lake, De Smet, Eagle Butte, Freeman, Garretson, Highmore, Huron, Kimball, Kyle, Marty, Mitchell, New Effington, Pierre, Salem, Scotland, Sioux Falls, Sturgis, Vermillion and Wall.

Other meetings: Vice Admiral Rick Cheeseman, Chief of Naval Personnel; Ashish Vazirani, Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness; Roelof Botha, Managing Partner of Sequoia Capital; representatives from Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas; Colonel Robert Newbauer, Commander and District Engineer of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Omaha District; and Alexandr Wang, CEO and founder of Scale AI. I had a phone call with Secretary of Veterans' Affairs Denis McDonough.

I also attended two events this past week to discuss advancements in artificial intelligence. I moderated a panel titled "Insights on Novel Military Applications of AI" at the Hill & Valley Forum. I attended an AI Impact forum hosted by Punchbowl News, where I had a fireside chat conversation on the promise of AI and the updates in Congress to incentivize innovation, particularly in the health care field and working toward cures for diseases like cancer.

Votes taken: 4 – two of these were on a nomination for a U.S. District Judge in Illinois, the other two were on the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act (FAA Reauthorization).

Hearings: I attended three hearings this week. One was in the Select Committee on Intelligence. The second was in the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) where we heard from Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines and Director of Defense Intelligence Agency Jeffrey Kruse. I had the opportunity to ask them about threats posed by the partnership between China and Russia. You can watch a clip of that here. I also attended a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing to get an update on budget requests for the VA.

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Classified briefings: I attended four classified briefings this week: One with SASC's Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities; one briefing on national security threats at the border; and one with SASC's Subcommittee on Cybersecurity. I also had a classified briefing to receive updates on the B-21 Raider stealth bomber coming to Ellsworth Air Force Base.

Legislation introduced: Senator Cory Booker (D-N.J.) and I introduced the AI Grand Challenges Act, legislation that directs the National Science Foundation (NSF) to establish an AI Grand Challenges Program. Through this, the NSF would administer a \$1 million minimum prize for national AI competitions. This would incentivize entrepreneurs to harness artificial intelligence to address measurable challenges to benefit the United States. You can read more about this legislation [here](#).

Legislation passed: This past week, legislation I introduced with Senator Chris Coons (D-Del.), the Stop Tax Penalties on American Hostages Act, passed the Senate. This bipartisan legislation would stop the IRS from imposing fines and penalties on American hostages. It also applies to wrongfully held detainees. It now heads to the House of Representatives. You can read more about this bill [here](#).

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Fort Pierre, Murdo, Sioux Falls and Vermillion.

Steps taken this past week: 62,304 steps or 30.83 miles

GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

Special School Board Meeting

May 7, 2024 – 6:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Executive session pursuant to SDCL1-25-2(4) for negotiations.

ADJOURN

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Third Ballot Question submitted to Secretary of State

(Pierre, S.D.) – Secretary of State Monae L. Johnson’s office received petitions this afternoon for an initiated amendment to the South Dakota Constitution establishing top-two primary elections. If validated and certified, the ballot question will appear on the general election ballot on November 5, 2024. The deadline to submit ballot question petitions to the Secretary of State is Tuesday, May 7, at 5:00 p.m. central time.

Petitions will be reviewed by the Secretary of State’s office in the order in which they were received. Below is a chart indicating the order of submission:

2024 Ballot Question Petitions Received							
Receipt Order	Sponsor Name(s)	Ballot Measure Type	Title of Measure	Date Received	Time Received	Sponsor's Estimated Petition Sheets	Sponsor's Estimated Signatures
1	Rick Weiland	Initiated Measure	An initiated measure prohibiting taxes on anything sold for human consumption.	04/24/2024	3:37 PM	2,889	25,000
2	Rick Weiland	Constitutional Amendment	An initiated amendment establishing a right to abortion in the state constitution.	05/01/2024	4:07 PM	6,191	55,000
3	Deanna Knudson & Joe Kirby	Constitutional Amendment	An initiated amendment to the South Dakota Constitution establishing top-two primary elections.	05/06/2024	2:33 PM	Unknown	46,500
ESTIMATED TOTAL SUBMITTED							126,500

In order to qualify to be placed on the 2024 general election ballot, an Initiated Measure requires 17,508 valid signatures and a Constitutional Amendment requires 35,017 valid signatures. As outlined in South Dakota Codified Law 2-1-16 and 2-1-17, the Secretary of State’s office will now conduct a random sampling of the petition signatures to determine the validity.

Ballot measures submitted to the Secretary of State’s office previously had a deadline for submission which was one year out from the general election. After a law change in 2023, ballot measure petitions have until the first Tuesday in May to file.

Individuals who wish to have their name withdrawn from a ballot measure petition must submit written notification to the Secretary of State’s office any time before the petition from which the individual is submitting is filed and certified for placement on the general election ballot.

Strong Economy, Low Unemployment, and Higher Job and Wage Growth Extend Social Security Trust Funds to 2035

The Social Security Board of Trustees today released its annual report on the financial status of the health of the Social Security Trust Funds. The combined asset reserves of the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Disability Insurance (OASI and DI) Trust Funds are projected to have enough dedicated revenue to pay all scheduled benefits and associated administrative costs until 2035, one year later than projected last year, with 83 percent of benefits payable at that time.

In the 2024 Annual Report to Congress, the Trustees announced:

The asset reserves of the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds declined by \$41 billion in 2023 to a total of \$2.788 trillion.

The total annual cost of the program is projected to exceed total annual income in 2024 and remain higher throughout the 75-year projection period. Total cost began to be higher than total income in 2021. Social Security's cost has exceeded its non-interest income since 2010.

The year when the combined trust fund reserves are projected to become depleted, if Congress does not act before then, is 2035. At that time, there would be sufficient income coming in to pay 83 percent of scheduled benefits.

"This year's report is a measure of good news for the millions of Americans who depend on Social Security, including the roughly 50 percent of seniors for whom Social Security is the difference between poverty and living in dignity -- any potential benefit reduction event has been pushed off from 2034 to 2035. More people are contributing to Social Security, thanks to strong economic policies that have yielded impressive wage growth, historic job creation, and a steady, low unemployment rate. So long as Americans across our country continue to work, Social Security can — and will — continue to pay benefits," said Martin O'Malley, Commissioner of Social Security. "Congress can and should take action to extend the financial health of the Trust Fund into the foreseeable future, just as it did in the past on a bipartisan basis. Eliminating the shortfall will bring peace of mind to Social Security's 70 million-plus beneficiaries, the 180 million workers and their families who contribute to Social Security, and the entire nation."

Other highlights of the Trustees Report include:

- Total income, including interest, to the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds amounted to \$1.351 trillion in 2023. (\$1.233 trillion from net payroll tax contributions, \$51 billion from taxation of benefits, and \$67 billion in interest)
- Total expenditures from the combined OASI and DI Trust Funds amounted to \$1.392 trillion in 2023.
- Social Security paid benefits of \$1.379 trillion in calendar year 2023. There were about 67 million beneficiaries at the end of the calendar year.
- The projected actuarial deficit over the 75-year long-range period is 3.50 percent of taxable payroll — lower than the 3.61 percent projected in last year's report.
- During 2023, an estimated 183 million people had earnings covered by Social Security and paid payroll taxes.
- The cost of \$7.2 billion to administer the Social Security program in 2023 was a very low 0.5 percent of total expenditures.
- The combined trust fund asset reserves earned interest at an effective annual rate of 2.4 percent in 2023.

"I will continue to urge Congress to protect and support Social Security and restore the growth of the funds. Whether Congress chooses to eliminate the shortfall by increasing revenue, reducing benefits, or some combination, is a matter of political preference, not affordability. Congress currently has several bills that address the shortfall without benefit cuts -- it should debate and vote on these and any other proposals. It's critical that Congress acts quickly to address the projected trust fund shortfalls, to gradually phase in necessary changes as the Trustees have recommended," Commissioner O'Malley said.

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The Board of Trustees usually comprises six members. Four serve by virtue of their positions with the federal government: Janet Yellen, Secretary of the Treasury and Managing Trustee; Martin O'Malley, Commissioner of Social Security; Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Health and Human Services; and Julie Su, Acting Secretary of Labor. The two public trustee positions are currently vacant.

View the 2024 Trustees Report at www.ssa.gov/OACT/TR/2024/.

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Primary Election - June 4

Absentee Voting Begins April 19

General Election - Nov 5

Absentee Voting Begins September 20

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Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

May 7, 2024 – 7:00pm
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

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

1. Approval of Agenda
 2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
 3. Minutes
 4. Adjourn the 136th City Council
-
5. Convene the 137th City Council – Oath of Office
 - Appoint Vacant Council Seat – Ward 1
 - Election of Officers: President and Vice President
 - Appoint Advisory Committees
 6. Appoint Attorney
 7. Motion to approve bills each meeting & authorize the Finance Officer to pay payroll and all monthly bills in a timely manner to avoid penalties and take advantage of discounts
 8. Department Reports
 9. Rubble Site Discussion
 10. Wastewater Discussion
 11. 2023 Annual Report
 12. Bills
 13. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
 14. Hire Public Works Laborer
 15. Hire Summer Employees
 16. Adjournment

U.S. Department of Education Launches Next Phase of FAFSA Support Strategy to Boost Completion Rate Among High School Students

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) today announced additional steps to support students and their families with the Better FAFSA. The Department is launching a multi-million-dollar program as part of the FAFSA Student Support Strategy to help school districts, state, nonprofits and other public and private organizations with efforts to boost FAFSA completion. Since the new 2024–25 FAFSA form became available on Dec. 30, more than 8.95 million forms have been successfully submitted.

The FAFSA Student Support Strategy funds will help grow capacity for organizations to expand the availability of advisers, counselors, and coaches to support students and contributors through the FAFSA applications, including during extended hours through evenings, weekends, and the summer weeks. It will also facilitate FAFSA submission clinics, including through partnerships with schools and districts, and provide transportation support as needed. Additionally, these funds will provide communication supports to help organizations communicate with parents and students via text, phone calls, and videoconferences, in multiple languages as needed, to help them complete their forms.

The FAFSA Student Support Strategy aims to continue increasing the number of high school students who complete a 2024-25 FAFSA and enroll in college, particularly first-time college students and students of color. This investment builds on the Department's efforts to help students, families, and institutions through the 2024-25 FAFSA application cycle, in addition to the College Support Strategy, the FAFSA Fast Break campaign, and direct communication efforts with institutions and stakeholders via the FAFSA Fast News blog.

Over the past few months, the Department has sent approximately 70 million emails to students encouraging them to complete the Better FAFSA form, as well as engaged with hundreds of superintendents and principals to help drive submission efforts, garnering over 200 commitments from companies, non-profits, and community organizations to help boost FAFSA submissions. Last week, the Department kicked-off a series of regional and local media engagement in media markets across the country to drive awareness and increase completion rates, targeting states with the largest high school senior FAFSA submission gaps.

"We are determined to close the FAFSA completion gap," said U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten. "The funding we're announcing today will support states, districts, and community-based groups build capacity and leverage their power to ensure that every student who needs help paying for college turns in their FAFSA form."

The program will provide up to \$50 million for grantees and will be implemented by ECMC to support organizations with demonstrated experience expanding college access and enrollment. The funding will be prioritized for organizations currently working with schools and districts, and those that have deep ties with students and families which have the reach and capacity to help decrease barriers and increase FAFSA submissions.

The Department continues to create and share resources for schools, students, families, and institutions of higher education to ensure they have the tools and information they need to receive and award financial aid. More information can be found at [Ed.gov/better-FAFSA](https://ed.gov/better-FAFSA).

This announcement comes as the Department has made significant progress to address known issues with the 2024-25 FAFSA form and transmitted the Institutional Student Information Records (ISIRs) from more than 8.95 million applications to schools, states, and designated scholarship organizations. Most four-year institutions are now sending student aid offers, including the vast majority of schools with upcoming admissions deadlines.

That's Life by Tony Bender

Current events quiz

I'm not saying things are weird, but things are weird out there. Clowns to the left of you, jokers to the right, here you are, stuck in the newspaper with me. Let's see if you're up to speed on current events or blissfully unaware. Or, in medical nomenclature, on Prozac or not.

1. Things Kristi Noem has killed:
 - A. Puppies
 - B. Goats
 - C. A man in Reno
 - D. Any chance of becoming Vice President
2. The winner of the 150th Kentucky Derby:
 - A. Mystik Dan
 - B. Dan Gladden
 - C. Mystic Pizza
 - D. Hootie Patootie
3. To what do the Minnesota Twins attribute their recent winning streak?
 - A. Scoring more runs
 - B. Voodoo sausage ritual
 - C. Goat sacrifice
 - D. The high stanky cheese
4. What are Drake and Kendrick fighting for?
 - A. My dad can out-rap your dad.
 - B. Attention
 - C. Dank stash
 - D. Everyone is Kung Fu Fighting.
5. Epic band name:
 - A. Johnny and the Brain Farts
 - B. Optimistic Death Wish
 - C. Just a Phase
 - D. Howdy Officer
6. What we've learned from the Trump hush money trial:
 - A. Biden sucks.
 - B. No-Doz sucks.
 - C. Whoever smelt it dealt it.
 - D. It's very unfair. People are saying it's the most unfair thing ever against the most unfairly treated victim in the history of victimhood.
7. What you can learn at college:
 - A. Godless Communism
 - B. Godless Capitalism
 - C. Godless Godliness
 - D. Camping
8. Why did Kristi Noem claim she met with Kim Jong Un?
 - A. Mixed him up with the chef at Lee Ho Fook's.
 - B. Who among us hasn't made that mistake?
 - C. Her ghostwriter was told to spice it up.
 - D. Trying to boost her murderous dictatorial street cred.
9. What Doug Burgum wouldn't do to become part a Trump administration?
 - A. Sell his soul
 - B. Stop wearing chaps
 - C. Grovel
 - D. None of the above.
10. Starbucks recently reported a huge drop in sales because:
 - A. Not everyone can afford a El Duce Macchiato Foo Foo.
 - B. Disastrous "Milk It Fresh" in-house cow experiment.
 - C. Worldwide froth shortage
 - D. Mysterious dip in South Dakota Pup Cup sales

BONUS: What is Minnesota Timberwolves wunderkind Anthony Edwards' nickname?

- A. Ant Man
- B. Cicada Man
- C. 8 pound, 6 ounce newborn infant Anthony, don't even know a word yet, just a little infant and so cuddly, but still omnipotent.
- D. Goat Man

Answers: 1.C; 2. D; 3. D; 4. D. 5. A; 6. C; 7. C; 8. A; 9. D; 10. B; Bonus: D. Grades: 11-8 correct: I have a feeling we were hacked. 6-8 correct: Smarter than the average bear. 3-5 correct: In baseball those are HOF numbers. 0-2 correct: My people.

South Dakota celebrates Teacher Appreciation Week and recognizes Regional Teachers of the Year

PIERRE, S.D. – May 6-10 is Teacher Appreciation Week, a time to celebrate the teachers who dedicate their time and energy to the futures of the youngest citizens in South Dakota communities.

“Teachers across the state create a lasting impact on South Dakota kids in hundreds of ways every day,” said Secretary of Education Joe Graves. “They teach, but they also lift up and guide their students through the difficulties and pains that have always been a part of growing up. A teacher’s impact goes far beyond the classroom -- their influence carries on years after their students leave the classroom.”

As part of the week’s events, the South Dakota Department of Education (DOE) announced the names of the state’s Regional Teachers of the Year.

The 2025 Regional Teachers of the Year are as follows:

Region 1: Amy Verhelst, Kindergarten, Sioux Valley Elementary School, Volga

Region 2: Erin Rieff, Art, Brandon Valley Middle School, Brandon

Region 3: Megan Wilson, Math, Sanborn Central High School, Forestburg

Region 4: Christy Saltsman, K-8 Physical Education and 6-8 Math, Gettysburg School District, Gettysburg

Region 5: Michelle Abbott, 2nd grade, West Elementary School, Spearfish

A panel will select one of these regional finalists to represent the state as the 2025 South Dakota Teacher of the Year. That individual will be South Dakota’s candidate for the National Teacher of the Year Award.

DOE representatives will be visiting each of the Regional Teachers of the Year during Teacher Appreciation Week. They will be at Brandon Valley Middle School and Sioux Valley Elementary on Monday, at West Elementary on Tuesday, and at Sanborn Central and Gettysburg on Thursday.

Visit sdteach.org to hear some of the state’s finest educators talk about why they love the teaching profession.

SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's May Column – Let us Never Forget

As Memorial Day approaches, it is a great time to pause and consider the true meaning of this holiday. This is a day for national awareness and reverence. It's a day to honor those Americans who died while defending our nation and our values. We can never underestimate or over appreciate the costs they bore for us.

Let us never forget how fortunate we are to live in freedom. And let us always commemorate our history and honor the sacrifices these heroes gave to protect that freedom. They led colorful, vivid, and passionate lives, and we owe it to them and their families to honor and pay tribute to them.

To me, cemeteries are like libraries – rich in history with hundreds of headstones that each tell a story. I challenge you to visit a cemetery, especially a veteran's cemetery, walk down each row and capture each veteran's story. You'll read about great Americans, recognize their valor, and applaud the blessings their bravery secured. They came from all backgrounds, ages, faiths, colors, and creeds.

Books help us open our minds and increase our understanding of the world around us. Veteran's headstones tell their stories. They tell us when they served, where they served, and what their mission was. Each veteran is unique and exploring their memoirs will leave a lasting impact.

Never forget that our veterans sacrificed their future and their dreams, and it is our duty to keep their legacy fresh in the memories of future generations.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



**Greg Whitlock,
Secretary
South Dakota
Department of
Veterans Affairs**



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Ballot groups are submitting petitions for open primaries and recreational marijuana

List of measures added or pending for the November ballot grows to six

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 6, 2024 4:24 PM

South Dakota voters might decide in November if future primary elections should be open to all voters and whether recreational marijuana use should be legalized for adults.

Backers of each ballot measure said they're turning in petitions this week, bringing the number of measures on the ballot or pending for addition to the ballot to six, with potential remaining for more. The deadline to submit petitions for a new law or law change is Tuesday. The deadline to refer a law passed by the Legislature to the ballot is June 25.

The Secretary of State's Office must now verify that the open primary and recreational marijuana petitions have enough signatures from registered voters.

Joe Kirby, chairman of the South Dakota Open Primaries ballot question committee, drove the group's petitions to the Capitol in Pierre on Monday.

"It's basic democracy," Kirby said of the measure.

He said the group is submitting about 46,000 signatures to the secretary of state, surpassing the 35,017 signatures required for a proposed constitutional amendment.

A primary is a preliminary election used by political parties to select candidates for the general election.

Democrats allow everyone, including the state's approximately 150,000 independents and non-politically affiliated voters, to participate in their primaries, while Republicans limit theirs to party members.

Under the open primaries proposal, all candidates for an individual office would run in the same primary, regardless of their party, and the top two vote-getters would advance to the general election.

Kirby, a Republican, said the current primary system rewards and encourages partisan politics. He said when politicians are held accountable to more voters in

He said an open primary system would result in more moderate, South Dakota-focused candidates gaining traction.

"The only real opponents are the party bosses on the left and right," Kirby said.

Republican critics, however, argue that the system would dilute party ideologies and allow non-party members too much influence over the selection of candidates.

"We are 110% opposed to the idea," South Dakota Republican Party Chair John Wiik told South Dakota Searchlight last year. "It is our job in the Republican Party to put out the best candidates and decide who's going to represent us on the general election ballot."

The initiative to legalize adult recreational marijuana use in the state has more than enough signatures and will be submitted around noon Tuesday, according to Matthew Schweich, who is leading the effort. He said the group has yet to count its signatures, but it has a "good, healthy buffer," beyond the 17,508 needed for proposed laws not amending the state constitution.

Advocates believe the measure would create a new source of tax revenue and provide regulatory clarity for cannabis use. South Dakota voters legalized medical marijuana in 2020. A portion of that same ballot measure that would have legalized recreational marijuana was challenged in court and invalidated.

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More submitted petitions and ballot measures

Among other citizen-led measures for which petitions have already been submitted, one proposal aims to reinstate abortion rights in the state constitution.

Another would repeal the state sales tax on anything sold for human consumption, except alcoholic beverages and prepared food. The measure, which targets grocery taxes, would not prohibit cities from taxing groceries. Currently, the state has a 4.2% sales and use tax, and cities can tack on an additional 2% tax.

Verification of the signatures on those measures is pending.

Meanwhile, the Legislature has placed two constitutional amendments on the ballot for voter consideration. The first would modernize state constitutional language by replacing references to male officeholders with gender-neutral terms. The second seeks to lift a ban on work requirements for Medicaid expansion enrollees, potentially altering access to the joint federal-state health care program.

Other possible ballot measures

Voters could also be asked to reject a new state law passed by the Legislature that would regulate aspects of carbon dioxide pipelines. The deadline for turning in signatures to refer a legislative measure to the ballot is June 25.

Supporters of the legislation, passed last winter, said it implements new protections for landowners while providing a path forward for a controversial carbon dioxide pipeline project. Opponents view it as a capitulation to the pipeline company that takes some power from counties and gives it to the state.

Jim Eschenbaum is managing the petition effort. He said the group has not counted its signatures but is confident it will collect the 17,508 it needs.

Other petitions that may be circulating in search of signatures, according to the Secretary of State's Office, include efforts to revise legislative term limits, to prevent the Legislature from amending or repealing successful ballot measures for seven years, and to repeal the state's medical marijuana program.

Ballot question list

Measures placed on the Nov. 5 ballot by the Legislature:

An amendment to the state constitution updating references to certain officeholders and people (replacing male-specific pronouns with neutral language).

An amendment to the state constitution authorizing the state to impose work requirements on certain people who are eligible for expanded Medicaid.

Measures submitted or soon to be submitted for inclusion on the Nov. 5 ballot, which are pending verification of the required number of petition signatures:

An initiated measure prohibiting state sales taxes on items sold for human consumption, specifically targeting state sales taxes on groceries.

An initiated amendment to the state constitution re-establishing abortion rights.

An initiated amendment to the state constitution establishing open primary elections.

An initiated measure legalizing adult recreational use, possession and distribution of marijuana.

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

Statewide child care task force meets, sets plan for the rest of the year

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MAY 6, 2024 2:42 PM

A child care task force made up of 24 South Dakota lawmakers, business leaders, parents and early childhood professionals had its first meeting last month, and the group plans to tackle the issue in meetings throughout the rest of the year.

South Dakota's lack of affordable and accessible child care has been a concern in political and economic sectors for years, especially after the coronavirus pandemic widened cracks in the child care industry and Gov. Kristi Noem campaigned on the issue in 2022. South Dakota suffers an estimated \$329 million loss in productivity due to its inadequate child care landscape, according to a study from ReadyNation, a nonprofit organization focused on business and economic development across the country.

"We know that child care is critical to both the state's prosperity and the workforce participation of thousands of South Dakotan parents," said Brookings Sen. Tim Reed in a news release. "It's time we take a careful look at what we might do to better support access and quality across the state and to explore common sense reforms that might better enable the state to meet the needs of its children, families and employers."

The first meeting allowed members to explore challenges the child care industry faces and examples of how other states are working to stabilize the industry and support the workforce.

The meetings are not open to the public, said Kayla Klein, executive director of Early Learner SD. She said it would be "too messy" if too many people attend or don't attend all meetings, since it'll be a "progressive learning experience."

Klein said future conversations among task force members will lead to an idea of what investments "might be feasible" or what bills might be introduced at the next legislative session. The task force will not only focus on child care, Klein added, but the "whole perspective" for early childhood education, including preschool.

"It's working with legislators — and state departments, too — to figure out what they want as long-term plans," Klein said, "and then working with advocates and getting some field perspective so we can find where to meet in the middle."

The task force will meet in Aberdeen in June, Pierre in August, and Deadwood in October ahead of a final report detailing recommendations by the group in December.

"I think this is just a really great jumping off point," Klein added. "It's great the legislative body is taking an interest along with fellow advocates and stakeholders across the state to consider what types of investments South Dakota should be making when it involves our youngest learners in the state."

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.

Bird Flu Is Bad for Poultry and Dairy Cows. It's Not a Dire Threat for Most of Us — Yet.

BY: AMY MAXMEN - MAY 6, 2024 9:23 AM

Headlines are flying after the Department of Agriculture confirmed that the H5N1 bird flu virus has infected dairy cows around the country. Tests have detected the virus among cattle in nine states, mainly in Texas and New Mexico, and most recently in Colorado, said Nirav Shah, principal deputy director at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at a May 1 event held by the Council on Foreign Relations.

A menagerie of other animals have been infected by H5N1, and at least one person in Texas. But what scientists fear most is if the virus were to spread efficiently from person to person. That hasn't happened and might not. Shah said the CDC considers the H5N1 outbreak "a low risk to the general public at this time."

Viruses evolve and outbreaks can shift quickly. "As with any major outbreak, this is moving at the speed

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of a bullet train," Shah said. "What we'll be talking about is a snapshot of that fast-moving train." What he means is that what's known about the H5N1 bird flu today will undoubtedly change.

With that in mind, KFF Health News explains what you need to know now.

Q: Who gets the bird flu?

Mainly birds. Over the past few years, however, the H5N1 bird flu virus has increasingly jumped from birds into mammals around the world. The growing list of more than 50 species includes seals, goats, skunks, cats, and wild bush dogs at a zoo in the United Kingdom. At least 24,000 sea lions died in outbreaks of H5N1 bird flu in South America last year.

What makes the current outbreak in cattle unusual is that it's spreading rapidly from cow to cow, whereas the other cases — except for the sea lion infections — appear limited. Researchers know this because genetic sequences of the H5N1 viruses drawn from cattle this year were nearly identical to one another.

The cattle outbreak is also concerning because the country has been caught off guard. Researchers examining the virus's genomes suggest it originally spilled over from birds into cows late last year in Texas, and has since spread among many more cows than have been tested. "Our analyses show this has been circulating in cows for four months or so, under our noses," said Michael Worobey, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

Q: Is this the start of the next pandemic?

Not yet. But it's a thought worth considering because a bird flu pandemic would be a nightmare. More than half of people infected by older strains of H5N1 bird flu viruses from 2003 to 2016 died. Even if death rates turn out to be less severe for the H5N1 strain currently circulating in cattle, repercussions could involve loads of sick people and hospitals too overwhelmed to handle other medical emergencies.

Although at least one person has been infected with H5N1 this year, the virus can't lead to a pandemic in its current state. To achieve that horrible status, a pathogen needs to sicken many people on multiple continents. And to do that, the H5N1 virus would need to infect a ton of people. That won't happen through occasional spillovers of the virus from farm animals into people. Rather, the virus must acquire mutations for it to spread from person to person, like the seasonal flu, as a respiratory infection transmitted largely through the air as people cough, sneeze, and breathe. As we learned in the depths of covid-19, airborne viruses are hard to stop.

That hasn't happened yet. However, H5N1 viruses now have plenty of chances to evolve as they replicate within thousands of cows. Like all viruses, they mutate as they replicate, and mutations that improve the virus's survival are passed to the next generation. And because cows are mammals, the viruses could be getting better at thriving within cells that are closer to ours than birds'.

The evolution of a pandemic-ready bird flu virus could be aided by a sort of superpower possessed by many viruses. Namely, they sometimes swap their genes with other strains in a process called reassortment. In a study published in 2009, Worobey and other researchers traced the origin of the H1N1 "swine flu" pandemic to events in which different viruses causing the swine flu, bird flu, and human flu mixed and matched their genes within pigs that they were simultaneously infecting. Pigs need not be involved this time around, Worobey warned.

Q: Will a pandemic start if a person drinks virus-contaminated milk?

Not yet. Cow's milk, as well as powdered milk and infant formula, sold in stores is considered safe because the law requires all milk sold commercially to be pasteurized. That process of heating milk at high temperatures kills bacteria, viruses, and other teeny organisms. Tests have identified fragments of H5N1 viruses in milk from grocery stores but confirm that the virus bits are dead and, therefore, harmless.

Unpasteurized "raw" milk, however, has been shown to contain living H5N1 viruses, which is why the FDA and other health authorities strongly advise people not to drink it. Doing so could cause a person to become seriously ill or worse. But even then, a pandemic is unlikely to be sparked because the virus — in

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its current form — does not spread efficiently from person to person, as the seasonal flu does.

Q: What should be done?

A lot! Because of a lack of surveillance, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other agencies have allowed the H5N1 bird flu to spread under the radar in cattle. To get a handle on the situation, the USDA recently ordered all lactating dairy cattle to be tested before farmers move them to other states, and the outcomes of the tests to be reported.

But just as restricting covid tests to international travelers in early 2020 allowed the coronavirus to spread undetected, testing only cows that move across state lines would miss plenty of cases.

Such limited testing won't reveal how the virus is spreading among cattle — information desperately needed so farmers can stop it. A leading hypothesis is that viruses are being transferred from one cow to the next through the machines used to milk them.

To boost testing, Fred Gingrich, executive director of a nonprofit organization for farm veterinarians, the American Association of Bovine Practitioners, said the government should offer funds to cattle farmers who report cases so that they have an incentive to test. Barring that, he said, reporting just adds reputational damage atop financial loss.

"These outbreaks have a significant economic impact," Gingrich said. "Farmers lose about 20% of their milk production in an outbreak because animals quit eating, produce less milk, and some of that milk is abnormal and then can't be sold."

The government has made the H5N1 tests free for farmers, Gingrich added, but they haven't budgeted money for veterinarians who must sample the cows, transport samples, and file paperwork. "Tests are the least expensive part," he said.

If testing on farms remains elusive, evolutionary virologists can still learn a lot by analyzing genomic sequences from H5N1 viruses sampled from cattle. The differences between sequences tell a story about where and when the current outbreak began, the path it travels, and whether the viruses are acquiring mutations that pose a threat to people. Yet this vital research has been hampered by the USDA's slow and incomplete posting of genetic data, Worobey said.

The government should also help poultry farmers prevent H5N1 outbreaks since those kill many birds and pose a constant threat of spillover, said Maurice Pitesky, an avian disease specialist at the University of California-Davis.

Waterfowl like ducks and geese are the usual sources of outbreaks on poultry farms, and researchers can detect their proximity using remote sensing and other technologies. By zeroing in on zones of potential spillover, farmers can target their attention. That can mean routine surveillance to detect early signs of infections in poultry, using water cannons to shoo away migrating flocks, relocating farm animals, or temporarily ushering them into barns. "We should be spending on prevention," Pitesky said.

Q: OK it's not a pandemic, but what could happen to people who get this year's H5N1 bird flu?

No one really knows. Only one person in Texas has been diagnosed with the disease this year, in April. This person worked closely with dairy cows, and had a mild case with an eye infection. The CDC found out about them because of its surveillance process. Clinics are supposed to alert state health departments when they diagnose farmworkers with the flu, using tests that detect influenza viruses, broadly. State health departments then confirm the test, and if it's positive, they send a person's sample to a CDC laboratory, where it is checked for the H5N1 virus, specifically. "Thus far we have received 23," Shah said. "All but one of those was negative."

State health department officials are also monitoring around 150 people, he said, who have spent time around cattle. They're checking in with these farmworkers via phone calls, text messages, or in-person visits to see if they develop symptoms. And if that happens, they'll be tested.

Another way to assess farmworkers would be to check their blood for antibodies against the H5N1 bird

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flu virus; a positive result would indicate they might have been unknowingly infected. But Shah said health officials are not yet doing this work.

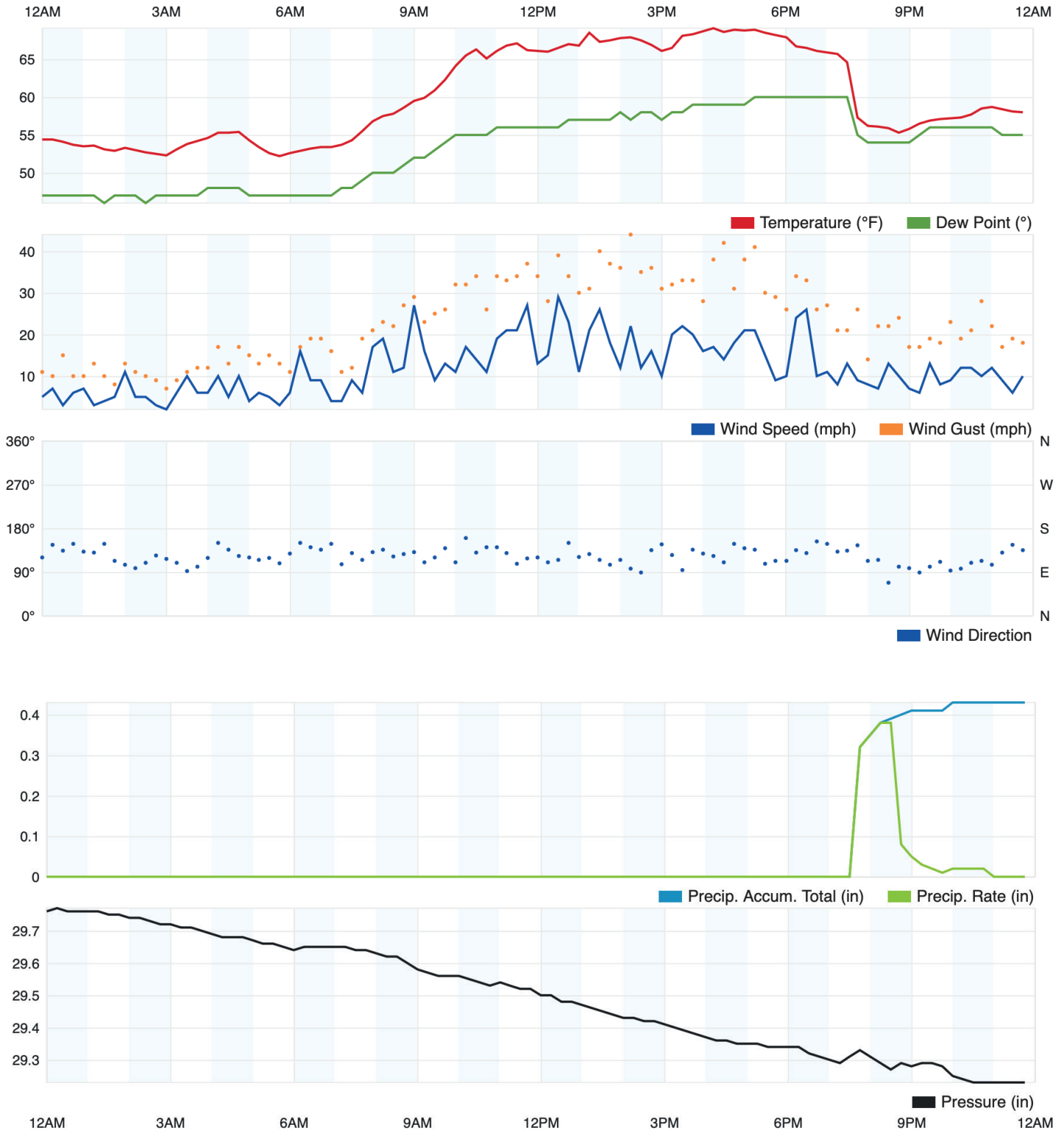
"The fact that we're four months in and haven't done this isn't a good sign," Worobey said. "I'm not super worried about a pandemic at the moment, but we should start acting like we don't want it to happen."

Amy Maxmen, public health local editor and correspondent, covers efforts to prevent disease and improve well-being outside of the medical system, and the obstacles that stand in the way. Before joining KFF Health News in 2024, she was a senior reporter at Nature covering health inequities, global health, infectious diseases, and genomics. She's also written for The New York Times, The Washington Post, Bloomberg Businessweek, National Geographic, and many other outlets.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 59 °F

Mostly Cloudy
and Breezy

Tonight



Low: 40 °F

Mostly Cloudy

Wednesday



High: 66 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Chance
Showers

Wednesday
Night



Low: 45 °F

Chance
Showers

Thursday



High: 69 °F

Sunny

Today



Highs: 52-64°F

Wednesday



Highs: 58-69°F

Thursday



Highs: 64-69°F

There is still a chance (15-45%) for some showers over north central SD today, but for the rest of the area just expect the clouds to linger. Clouds will start to clear out on Wednesday and temperatures will warm.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 69 °F at 4:19 PM

Low Temp: 52 °F at 2:58 AM

Wind: 44 mph at 2:10 PM

Precip: : 0.43

Day length: 14 hours, 39 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 1928

Record Low: 24 in 2019

Average High: 67

Average Low: 40

Average Precip in May.: 0.76

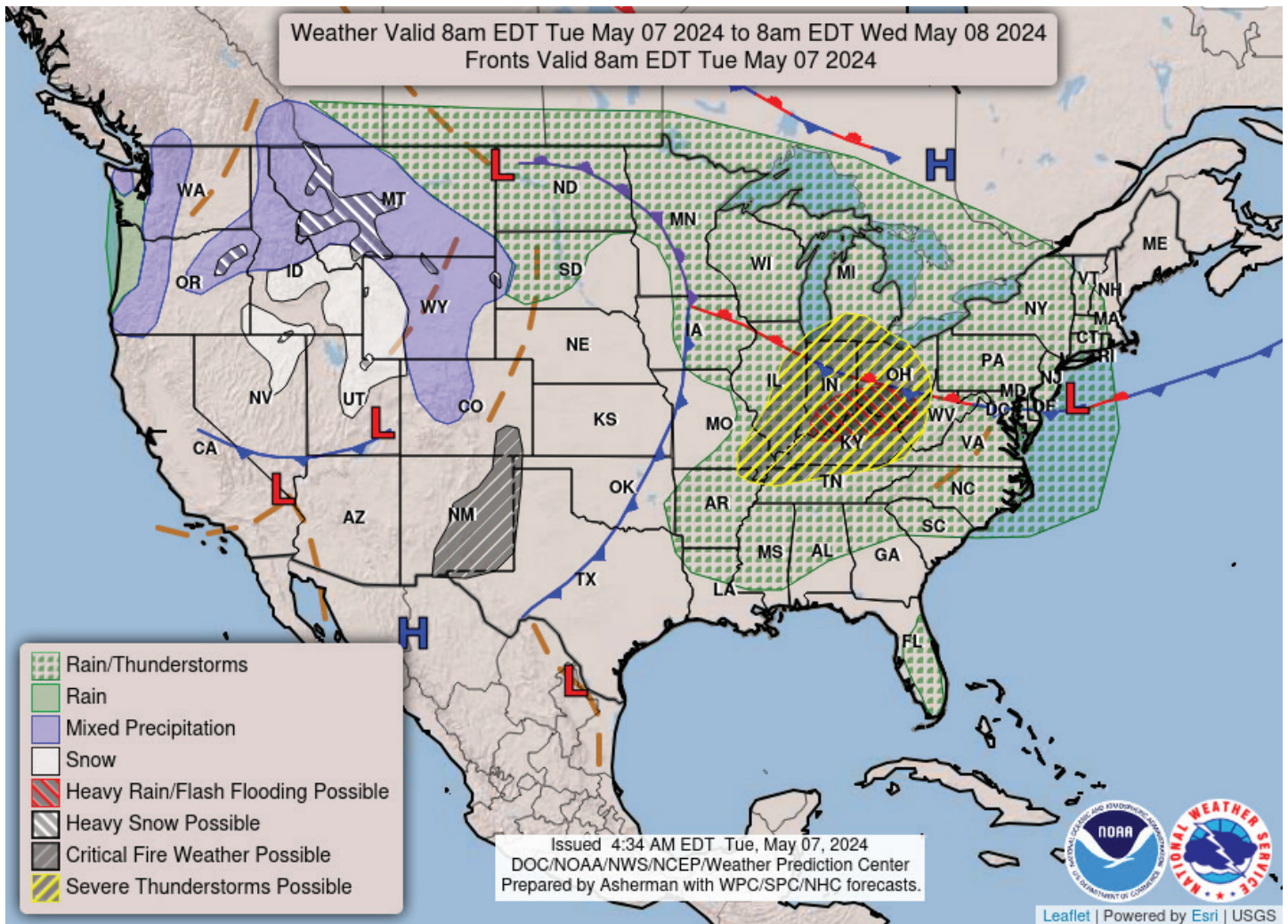
Precip to date in May: 0.61

Average Precip to date: 4.73

Precip Year to Date: 5.14

Sunset Tonight: 8:48:41 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:07:47 am



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Today in Weather History

May 7, 1896: A strong, estimated F3 tornado moved northeast from 12 miles SSW of Clark to 3 miles west of Watertown, to beyond Lake Kampeska. It was estimated to be on the ground for a distance of 30 miles. Near the start of the path, a woman was killed, and ten people were injured in one home. Parts of a house were found up to two miles away. The tornado also leveled barns near Watertown.

1840: A powerful tornado wrecked many boats at the Natchez Landing in Mississippi then plowed through the city on the bluff. The tornado killed 317 people and injured 109 others. The storm is currently the second deadliest tornado on record. The actual death toll could be higher as slaves were not counted.

1964 - The temperature at White Mountain 2, located in California, dipped to 15 degrees below zero to set a record for May for the continental U.S. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thirty-one cities in the western U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Highs of 93 degrees at Portland OR and San Jose CA were the warmest of record for so early in the season. The high of 92 degrees at Quillayute WA was a record for the month of May. The temperature at Sacramento CA hit 105 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A powerful storm in the north central U.S. produced up to three feet of snow in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming and the mountains of south central Montana. Up to five inches of rain drenched central Montana in less than 24 hours, and flash flooding in Wyoming caused a million dollars damage. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thirty-two cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, and 24 hour snowfall totals of 7.2 inches at Buffalo NY and 10.7 inches at Rochester NY were records for the month of May. While northerly winds ushered unseasonably cold air into the eastern U.S., temperatures warmed rapidly in the Great Plains Region, reaching the 90s in Kansas. The temperature at Manhattan KS soared from a low of 30 degrees to a high of 88 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Gale force winds lashed the northern and central Pacific coast. A wind gust of 52 mph at Eureka CA established a record for the month of May. Strong winds over northeastern Colorado, associated with a fast moving Pacific cold front, gusted to 63 mph at Peetz. Snow developed over the northwest mountains of Wyoming late in the day, and Yellowstone National Park was whitened with 6 to 14 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1993: Serious flooding occurred in central Oklahoma following torrential rain and hail on this date through the 8th. Rainfall amounts on this date were generally around one inch. Oklahoma City, OK then recorded 6.64 inches of rain on the 8th, the third greatest daily rainfall amount ever observed in the city. Extensive flooding resulted, which killed four people, and the fire department had to rescue 183 others. More than 2,000 homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed. Damages were estimated at \$8 million.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

ENTRANCE EXAM

Booker T. Washington began life as a slave and ended life as a famous educator, author, orator and political leader. As a young man he wanted to attend Hampton Institute. He often recalled his "entrance exam" the headmaster gave him prior to his admission.

Wanting to be careful before admitting him to the Institute, the headmaster asked him to clean a room. To make sure his work was acceptable he swept the floor three times and dusted it four times.

Unable to find the slightest amount of dirt or dust, the headmaster said, "You'll do to enter this institution."

"That," said Washington, "was the turning point in my life."

Work has always been a significant part of God's creation. Often when we allow our tasks to become sheer drudgery or demeaning, we forget that whatever God calls upon us to do we are to do it as an act of worship and service to Him.

Paul said, "Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people." For Jesus' sake, we are to work without complaining or resentment because whatever we do we do to honor Him as part of our discipleship.

We were born to work and worship. They go together. Whatever He calls us to do, let's pass the "exam."

Prayer: Lord, we recall with fondness that You were called to work as a laborer in a carpenter's shop. May we, as You certainly did, do things to the glory of God. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Colossians 3:23-25



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:
05.03.24

6 13 15 53 56 11

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$306,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 43 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.06.24

3 6 11 17 30 10

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,250,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 58 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.06.24

10 32 35 43 47 6

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 13 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.04.24

11 12 20 34 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$85,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 13 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.06.24

10 56 58 59 67 20

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 42 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.06.24

7 23 24 56 60 25

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 42 Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Signatures submitted for 'top two' primary election in Republican-dominant South Dakota

By JACK DURA Associated Press

Supporters of a "top two" primary election system in South Dakota that would replace the current partisan process with one open to all voters have submitted thousands more petition signatures than required to bring a vote this fall on their ballot initiative.

On Monday, South Dakota Open Primaries sponsors said they submitted petitions with 47,000 signatures to Secretary of State Monae Johnson's office. The measure group needs 35,017 valid signatures to make the November ballot. Johnson's office has until Aug. 13 to validate the measure, a proposed constitutional amendment.

Under South Dakota's current primary election system, candidates in gubernatorial, congressional, legislative and county races compete in a partisan primary. The measure would allow all candidates to compete against each other in one primary, and the top two vote-getters in each race or for each seat would advance to the general election. A similar measure failed in 2016.

Other states such as California and Washington have "top two" primary elections similar to the measure proposed in South Dakota.

Measure sponsor Deanna "De" Knudson, a registered Republican, said she doesn't think the state has a fair system, in that it "excludes about half of the voters from the real race, and we just really believe that this is a fairness issue."

Republicans control South Dakota's Legislature and hold all statewide elected offices and congressional seats. Democrats haven't won a statewide election since 2008, when former U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson and U.S. Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin won reelection to their last terms.

South Dakota has nearly 602,000 registered voters, including 304,000 Republicans and 144,000 Democrats, but people registered as "no party affiliation" or "independent" total nearly 150,000 voters, according to online voter registration tracking.

State Republican Party Chairman and state Sen. John Wiik said he vehemently opposes the measure. He said he sees "no good coming out of it for the Republican Party." The state GOP's central committee unanimously opposed the measure, he said.

"I want Republicans to be able to choose the Republican candidate, and Democrats to choose the Democrat candidate," Wiik said. "If you want to be an independent, then you're independent of the decisions that affect your lives."

Knudson said the measure would bring a much more competitive process and "will make sure that the winning candidate is the one most South Dakotans agree on." She questioned the balance of power in the Legislature, where Democrats hold 11 of 105 seats, and whether that is truly reflective of voters' will.

State Democratic Party Executive Director Dan Ahlers said the party hasn't taken a stance on the measure. The Democratic Party allows "no party affiliation" and independent voters to vote in its primary, along with registered Democrats.

Nevada's 'Feet Pics' Preferences Put State at Top of Feetfinder Fetish Findings

Stephanie Valentine | Wealth of Geeks undefined

Despite the striking sights, scenery, and shows throughout the Silver State, Nevadans stepped foot into a new niche — feet pics. The state sought to shed its shoes for an average of 17,078 monthly related searches. That earns Nevada the top spot in a recent FeetFinder study.

FeetFinder is an online foot fetish platform. Populated by fetish content creators and their fans, the site

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examined search data from all 50 states to find which states' residents were the most foot-focused.

Study Metrics

FeetFinder utilized Google search data from all states, recording which foot-related keywords cropped up in any given inquiry. The study sought the use of 27 phrases, such as "sexy feet," "pretty feet," "good feet," "hot feet," "feet videos," and "bare feet." The study also noted searches pertaining to foot obsession content creation — "how to sell feet pics," "feet pics for sale," and "sell feet pics."

The brand pulled data from Google Keyword Planner, a service that provides annual and monthly search data for buzzwords and key terms. The service records state data as well as information from the United States as a whole. The study's conductors compared the cumulative number of searches for each state to its population to tabulate the number of searches per 100,000 residents.

Top States

Nevada ranks No. 1 for related searches, with around 537 queries per 100,000 Nevadans. Users searched the state's top term, "feet finder," nearly 10,000 times monthly. Arizona follows closely in the No. 2 spot, with 36,798 monthly searches, equal to about 500 searches per 100,000 people.

Florida takes the No. 3 spot, with a whopping 109,757 monthly searches, which, when compared to its population, equals around 493 searches per 100,000. Colorado and Georgia's foot fans put them in the No. 4 and No. 5 spots, respectively.

Texas, New York, North Carolina, Utah, and California round out the rest of FeetFinder's top 10.

Bottom States

Feet pics aren't for everyone, especially residents of South Dakota. With a meager 2,613 searches per month, the state saw the fewest related queries. Adjusted for its population, South Dakota had only 287 searches per resident. Montana steals second-to-last, with its modest 3,305 searches equal to around 294 per 100,000 people.

Vermont follows in the No. 48 spot. Like Montana, Vermont searched 1,912 times, or around 294 times per 100,000. Vermont foot enthusiasts searched for "feet finder" over 1,000 times monthly.

Mississippi's 307 per 100,000 searches put the state in the No. 47 spot. Alaska was No. 46 on the least-interested list, with around 2,276 average monthly queries, or around 310 after population adjustments.

Minnesota, Idaho, Wyoming, North Dakota, and Iowa filled the rest of the bottom ten spots.

Feetfinder's Feelings on Findings

A FeetFinder spokesperson shares that Americans make 1.5 million frisky foot-related searches per month. U.S. fans of the site search "FeetFinder" around 775,916 times monthly; around 15,000 specific subcategory searches.

FeetFinder spoke about the prevalence of enthusiasm for feet, noting A-listers who have reported similar interests.

"Foot fetishes are common across America and seem to be growing in popularity year on year. Even so, celebrities including Britney Spears, Quentin Tarantino, and Elvis Presley have openly spoken about having a foot fetish," explains the company spokesperson.

They add that foot fetishes, once unmentionable and taboo, are becoming popular thanks to relaxed attitudes toward all fetishes. "Today, the fascination with feet pictures is more socially accepted as individuals feel more comfortable expressing their interests and engaging with like-minded communities."

This article was produced by Media Decision and syndicated by Wealth of Geeks.

China's Xi begins Serbia visit on the 25th anniversary of NATO's bombing of the Chinese Embassy

By JOVANA GEC and DUSAN STOJANOVIC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Chinese leader Xi Jinping's visit to European ally Serbia on Tuesday falls on a symbolic date: the 25th anniversary of the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade during NATO's air war over Kosovo.

U.S. jets dropped five bombs on the Chinese Embassy compound in the Serbian capital on May 7, 1999,

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setting it ablaze and killing three Chinese nationals. Twenty other people were injured in the incident, which has burdened relations between the two powers ever since.

Xi referred to the bombing in an op-ed published in Serbia's "Politika" newspaper on Tuesday, saying that "we must not forget that 25 years ago today, NATO brazenly bombed the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia," according to translations carried by Chinese state media.

"The Chinese people value peace but will never allow historical tragedies to happen again," Xi added.

The Western military alliance had launched the air war in March that year to force then Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic to end a brutal onslaught against ethnic Albanian rebels in Kosovo.

The U.S. at the time apologized and said the embassy bombing was a mistake that happened due to faulty intelligence. The intended target, Washington said, was the headquarters of a Serbian state arms exporter located on the same street, a few blocks away.

"Imagine that somebody would, even by accident, strike an American Embassy somewhere around the world. The reaction would be immediate," said Sven Biscop, a professor of European foreign and security policy at the Ghent University and Egmont Institute.

"So for a country like China, it is also clear that this is a big thing," he added. "And, of course, it has not been forgotten."

Angry protesters in China stormed U.S. diplomatic installations as the bombing fueled anti-American sentiments and speculation that the attack was intentional rather than accidental. Mistrust over the incident has endured to this day.

"We will probably never really conclusively know either way," Biscop said. "But one thing is sure. In war, incidents like that do happen, and I usually tend to go for the most simple explanation rather than try to invent complicated theories."

While straining Beijing's relations with the U.S., the embassy bombing brought China and Serbia closer together. China has emerged as Serbia's largest provider of foreign direct investment and its second-largest trading partner after the European Union.

Beijing opposed the NATO bombing campaign and has since backed Belgrade's bid to counter the Western-backed push for independence in Kosovo, a former Serbian province. In return, Serbia has been a loyal ally to Beijing and has opened its doors without restraint to billions of dollars of Chinese investment, even as it formally seeks EU membership.

"The friendship forged in blood between the peoples of China and Serbia has become the common memory of the two peoples and will inspire both sides to move forward together," Xi wrote. "We are willing to work with our Serbian friends to stay true to our original aspirations, join hands in progress, write a new chapter in national development and revitalization, and build a China-Serbia community with a shared future for mankind in the new era."

Signs of pro-China sentiments were clearly visible ahead of Xi's visit on Tuesday and Wednesday. In Belgrade, a huge Chinese flag was placed on a skyscraper along a roadway leading into the city from the airport. Smaller Chinese and Serbian flags could be seen downtown and along a highway.

Xi will arrive from France and proceed from Serbia to Hungary as part of his first European tour in five years.

He is expected to visit the site of the former embassy on the anniversary date and pay his respects to the bombing victims. A Chinese cultural center now stands at the spot where the embassy was once located.

The sprawling complex reportedly includes a Confucius Institute, workshops, exhibitions, offices, residential space and a hotel. It is seen as a symbol of China's growing influence in Serbia and across Europe.

Near the institute, a group of visitors from China last weekend bowed in front of a simple black-marble monument and laid flowers in honor of the victims of the 1999 bombing. An inscription on the monument in both Chinese and English reads: "Honor Martyrs, Cherish Peace."

Putin begins his fifth term as president, more in control of Russia than ever

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

Vladimir Putin began his fifth term Tuesday as Russian leader at a glittering Kremlin inauguration, setting out on another six years in office after destroying his political opponents, launching a devastating war in Ukraine and concentrating all power in his hands.

Already in office for nearly a quarter-century and the longest-serving Kremlin leader since Josef Stalin, Putin's new term doesn't expire until 2030, when he will be constitutionally eligible to run again.

At the ceremony inside the gilded Grand Kremlin Palace, Putin placed his hand on the Russian Constitution and vowed to defend it as a crowd of hand-picked dignitaries looked on.

Since succeeding President Boris Yeltsin in the waning hours of 1999, Putin has transformed Russia from a country emerging from economic collapse to a pariah state that threatens global security. Following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine that has become Europe's biggest conflict since World War II, Russia has been heavily sanctioned by the West and is turning to other regimes like China, Iran and North Korea for support.

The question now is what the 71-year-old Putin will do over the course of another six years, both at home and abroad.

Russian forces are gaining ground in Ukraine, deploying scorched-earth tactics as Kyiv grapples with shortages of men and ammunition. Both sides are taking heavy casualties.

Ukraine has brought the battle to Russian soil through drone and missile attacks, especially in border regions. In a speech in February, Putin vowed to fulfill Moscow's goals in Ukraine, and do what is needed to "defend our sovereignty and security of our citizens."

Shortly after his orchestrated reelection in March, Putin suggested that a confrontation between NATO and Russia is possible, and he declared he wanted to carve out a buffer zone in Ukraine to protect his country from cross-border attacks.

At home, Putin's popularity is closely tied to improving living standards for ordinary Russians.

He began his term in 2018 by promising to get Russia into the top five global economies, vowing it should be "modern and dynamic." Instead, Russia's economy has pivoted to a war footing, and authorities are spending record amounts on defense.

Analysts say now that Putin has secured another six years in power, the government could take the unpopular steps of raising taxes to fund the war and pressure more men to join the military.

At the start of a new term, the Russian government is routinely dissolved so that Putin can name a new prime minister and Cabinet.

One key area to watch is the Defense Ministry.

Last year, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu came under pressure over his conduct of the war, with mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin launching withering criticism against him for shortages of ammunition for his private contractors fighting in Ukraine. Prigozhin's brief uprising in June against the Defense Ministry represented the biggest threat to Putin's rule.

After Prigozhin was killed two months later in a mysterious plane crash, Shoigu appeared to have survived the infighting. But last month, his protege, Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov, was detained on charges of bribery amid reports of rampant corruption.

Some analysts have suggested Shoigu could become a victim of the government reshuffle but that would be a bold move as the war is still raging in Ukraine.

In the years following the invasion, authorities have cracked down on any form of dissent with a ferocity not seen since Soviet times. There is no sign that this repression will ease in Putin's new term.

His greatest political foe, opposition leader Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic penal colony in February. Other prominent critics have either been imprisoned or have fled the country, and even some of his opponents abroad fear for their security.

Laws have been enacted that threaten long prison terms for anyone who discredits the military. The Kremlin also targets independent media, rights groups, LGBTQ+ activists and others who don't hew to what Putin has emphasized as Russia's "traditional family values."

Israeli forces seize Gaza side of Rafah border crossing, putting cease-fire talks on knife's edge

By SAMY MAGDY, MELANIE LIDMAN and LEE KEATH Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — An Israeli tank brigade seized control on Tuesday of the Gaza Strip side of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt as Israel moved forward with an offensive in the southern city even as cease-fire negotiations with Hamas remain on a knife's edge.

The development came after hours of whiplash in the Israel-Hamas war, with the militant group on Monday saying it accepted an Egyptian-Qatari mediated cease-fire proposal. Israel, meanwhile, insisted the deal did not meet its core demands.

The high-stakes diplomatic moves and military brinkmanship left a glimmer of hope alive — if only barely — for an accord that could bring at least a pause in the 7-month-old war that has devastated the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli incursion overnight appeared to be short of the full-fledged offensive into Rafah that Israel has planned, and it was not immediately known if it would be expanded. President Joe Biden on Monday urgently warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu against launching an offensive on the southern Gaza city, hiking pressure for a cease-fire.

Aid groups say an attack would be catastrophic for the around 1.4 million Palestinians crammed into Rafah, most of whom fled Israel's onslaught elsewhere in Gaza.

The Israeli 401st Brigade entered the Rafah crossing early on Tuesday morning, the Israeli military said, taking "operational control" of the crucial border point. Footage released by the Israeli military showed Israeli flags flying from tanks that seized the crossing area. Details of the video matched known features of the crossing.

The military also carried out a flurry of strikes and bombardment across Rafah overnight, killing at least 23 Palestinians, including at least six women and five children, according to hospital records seen by The Associated Press.

The Rafah crossing is the main route for aid entering the besieged enclave and exit for those able to flee into Egypt. Both Rafah and the Kerem Shalom crossing between Israel and Gaza, the other main aid entry point, have been closed for at least the past two days. Though smaller entry points still operate, the closure is a blow to efforts to maintain the flow of food, medicine and other supplies that are keeping Gaza's population alive.

Jens Laerke, a spokesman for the U.N. humanitarian affairs office, warned that an assault on Rafah could break the fragile aid operation. He said all fuel entering Gaza comes through Rafah, and any disruption will halt humanitarian work.

"It will plunge this crisis into unprecedented levels of need, including the very real possibility of a famine," he said.

The Israeli military claimed it seized the crossing after receiving intelligence it was "being used for terrorist purposes." The military did not provide evidence to immediately support the assertion, though it alleged the area around the crossing had been used to launch a mortar attack that killed four Israeli troops and wounded others near the Kerem Shalom crossing on Sunday.

The military also said that ground troops and airstrikes targeted suspected Hamas positions in Rafah.

Wael Abu Omar, a spokesman for the Palestinian Crossings Authority, acknowledged Israeli forces had seized the crossing and had closed the facility for the time being. He said strikes had targeted the area around it since Monday.

An Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesperson declined to immediately comment on the Israeli seizure.

Egypt has previously warned that any seizure of Rafah — which is supposed to be part of a demilitarized border zone — or an attack that forces Palestinians to flee over the border into Egypt would threaten the 1979 peace treaty with Israel that's been a linchpin for regional security.

Israel's plans to attack Rafah have also raised fears of a dramatic surge in civilian deaths in a campaign of bombardments and offensives that has killed more than 34,700 Palestinians the past seven months, according to Gaza health officials. The assault has leveled large swaths of the territory, and northern Gaza

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has entered "full-blown famine," the head of the World Food Program, Cindy McCain, said Sunday.

The Rafah operation has also deepened the divide between Netanyahu and Biden over the conduct of the war. Netanyahu says attacking Rafah — which Israel says is Hamas' last major stronghold in the territory — is crucial to the war goal of destroying Hamas after its Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel.

In that unprecedented Hamas raid, militants killed some 1,200 people and took around 250 others as hostages back to Gaza. Israeli critics say Netanyahu is concerned about his government's survival, since hard-line partners in his coalition could bolt if he signs onto a deal that prevents a Rafah attack.

In their call Monday, Biden told Netanyahu that a cease-fire deal was the best way to win the return of the hostages still held by Hamas and believed to number around 100, along with the bodies of around 30 others.

As Israel announced it would push ahead with operations in Rafah, it said Monday the cease-fire proposal that Hamas agreed to did not meet its "core demands." But it said it would send a delegation to Egypt to continue negotiations.

An Egyptian official and a Western diplomat said the draft Hamas accepted had only minor changes in wording from a version the U.S. had earlier suggested and Israel had approved. The changes were made in consultation with CIA chief William Burns, who embraced the draft before sending it to the Palestinian group, the diplomat and official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the internal deliberations.

The White House said Burns was discussing the Hamas response with the Israelis and other regional officials.

According to a copy released by Hamas after its acceptance, the proposal outlines a phased release of the hostages alongside the gradual withdrawal of Israeli troops from the entire enclave and ending with a "sustainable calm," defined as a "permanent cessation of military and hostile operations."

In the first, 42-day stage of the cease-fire, Hamas would release 33 hostages — including women, children, older adults and the ill — in return for the release of hundreds of Palestinians in Israeli prisons, and Israeli forces would partially withdraw from parts of Gaza. The parties would then negotiate the terms of the next stage, under which the remaining civilian men and soldiers would be released, while Israeli forces would withdraw from the rest of Gaza.

Hamas has demanded an end to the war and complete Israeli withdrawal in return for the release of all hostages. Publicly, Israeli leaders have repeatedly rejected that trade-off, vowing to keep up their campaign until Hamas is destroyed.

Inside the Met Gala: A fairytale forest, woodland creatures, and some starstruck first-timers

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Sauntering through the hallways of the Metropolitan Museum of Art on the way to cocktails, James Corden spread his arms out comically, like he owned the place. "Let me know if you want me to talk you through any of this," he said, pointing to the precious art on the walls, joking around with Jeff Bezos and his partner Lauren Sánchez, who happened to be walking behind him.

It was all in fun, but Corden, like many celebrities, is a Met Gal a regular.

Then there are the first-timers. These guests, no matter how famous in their field, often profess a bit of starstruck wonder at the concentration of celebrity around them, and even some nerves, like a kid arriving at a new school.

For example: Stray Kids. The K-pop band arrived at their first gala en masse, all eight dressed by designer Tommy Hilfiger in different iterations of red, navy and white. Entering the museum they ascended the grand interior staircase, hit the receiving line, and then headed to cocktails, where, they said, they slowly started to relax.

"We were nervous at first," said band member Bang Chan. "We didn't know what to expect, who we would meet," added bandmate Felix. But they were settling in nicely, and had already spoken to Chris Hemsworth, Steven Yeun, and Brooklyn Nets guard Ben Simmons.

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Then there was Ayo Edebiri, star of "The Bear," who has been a multiple winner on the awards circuit this year but was attending her first gala. She seemed almost out of breath after greeting hosts Jennifer Lopez, Bad Bunny, Hemsworth and Anna Wintour at the top of the staircase.

"I'm really, really, really excited to be here," she said. "This is another really beautiful thing that I will try to do my best to remember."

Some other memorable moments and scenes from inside the gala:

A MAGICAL FOREST

Though the name of the gala's accompanying exhibit was "Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion," it wasn't really about Princess Aurora from our fairytales. Rather, it was about highlighting and illuminating fragile garments from the museum's collection that were now being "awakened" to the world. Still, it's safe to say the museum went all in on the fairytale vibe.

Entering the Great Hall, guests passed a huge centerpiece, 32 feet tall, representing a "whimsical tree." Huge green flowers made of fabric sprouted over a forest-like undergrowth with twisted branches that looked just like the foliage Sleeping Beauty's prince had to hack through to give her a true love's kiss. Guests then walked through a live string orchestra and a tableau of performers dressed as woodland creatures — in tunics and tights — frolicking in the forest.

FASHION AS ART

Given the choice of viewing the exhibit or heading straight to cocktails, most guests chose the latter. But some did head to the show, a multi-sensory fashion experience involving not only sight but sound, smell and touch. Lena Waithe spent time alone inspecting the garments, and said she was "just blown away by the work that I'm seeing."

The actor/producer added that she, as many, often thinks of fashion as fun and light. "But then I come here and am reminded that it's an art form," she said. And she recalled a speech Meryl Streep, as a Wintour-like character, makes to Anne Hathaway in "The Devil Wears Prada," about the clothes we wear having been chosen for us. "I think we need to be reminded of that, that our style is influenced by people who are long gone," Waithe said.

SETH MEYERS STAYS IN HIS LANE

Late-night host Meyers, attending the gala with wife, said it was a nice break to get an evening away from childcare. But he also jokingly asked why his little ones — ages 8, 6 and 2 — weren't invited. "I think it's very rude that Vogue didn't invite them," Meyers quipped. "It's so kid-friendly here. And they're so good at keeping their mitts off things."

Meyers said what he most enjoyed about the gala was seeing "a lot of people that I'm a fan of, or have interviewed on the show." But as for fashion, he likes to play it straight, he said: "Nobody wants a guy like me taking a big swing. I stay in my lane."

THE BROADWAY CROWD

There's always a strong Broadway contingent at the Met Gala, because Wintour is a huge theater fan. At this gala, Jonathan Groff, fresh off a Tony nomination for "Merrily We Roll Along," laughed and joked with good friend and fellow "Glee" alum (and "Funny Girl" star) Lea Michele, expecting her second child and resplendent in baby blue Rodarte. Groff reminisced about former Met Galas he's attended, including one where he performed from the show "Hair," and another in 2016 where guest Beyoncé had just released "Lemonade" about a week earlier. "That," he recalled, "was epic."

'LITTLE ME WOULD BE SO HAPPY'

A table away sat another Broadway star, J. Harrison Ghee. Last year Ghee attended their first gala, a month or so before winning the Tony for best actor in "Some Like it Hot." Ghee wore a dramatic feathered look by designer Howie B inspired, they said, by a caddis worm — perfectly in sync with the nature theme of the evening. The night, Ghee said, was proof that fashion was a vital and expressive art. And they added that "Little me would be so happy. I check in with them all the time — would they be proud? They would."

A DRESS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS (BROKEN) PARTS

As Sánchez and Bezos toured the exhibit, her distinctive dress made an equally distinctive noise as it

scraped across the floor. "We won't lose you," joked Bezos. Sánchez said she had burst into tears when she first tried on the eye-popping design by Fernando Garcia and Laura Kim of Oscar de la Renta. The voluminous skirt had pearl and mirrored appliques and was meant to evoke Tiffany glass. "If you need a mirror just use my dress," Sánchez quipped. She added that she felt the dress symbolized life — where everything is a bit broken, and it depends on what you do with the pieces. And she was misty-eyed when she described trying the dress on for Bezos: "He told me I had never looked so beautiful," she said.

Fun fact: Sánchez said Garcia had told her he needed an item to fix the dress, and had ordered it on Amazon.

A CLARION CALL TO DINNER

How do you get hundreds of chatting celebrities to hike across the museum for dinner? Organizers have tried a number of ways. One year, it was a team of buglers. Another year, Jon Batiste and his melodica led a band snaking through the crowd. Last year, David Byrne did the honors. On Monday it was a huge choir that emerged, singing original music entitled "Future of Us," accompanied by dancers. Then a bell rang, and the performers called out: "To dinner!" And off the crowd went — slowly — to the Temple of Dendur, where the fairytale motif continued with tables featuring "enchanted candelabras entwined with flower arrangements."

WHAT'S TO EAT?

Arriving late is still fashionable; Some guests were still arriving at 9 p.m. and even much later. But for those who made it for dinnertime, here's what was on the menu: a main course of filet of beef, pea tortellini, morels and spring vegetables, followed by a dessert of petits fours inspired by the Brothers Grimm fairytale of, yep, "Sleeping Beauty" — along with confections "in the shape of bespoke hats."

The Latest | Israel's military seizes the Gaza side of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt

By The Associated Press undefined

An Israeli tank brigade has seized control of the Gaza Strip side of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, authorities say, moving forward with an offensive in the southern city even as cease-fire negotiations with Hamas remain on a knife's edge.

The move comes after hours of whiplash in the Israel-Hamas war, with the militant group on Monday saying it accepted an Egyptian-Qatari mediated cease-fire proposal. Israel, meanwhile, insisted the deal did not meet its core demands. The high-stakes diplomatic moves and military brinkmanship left a glimmer of hope alive — but only barely — for an accord that could bring at least a pause in the 7-month-old war that has devastated the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli 401st Brigade entered the Rafah crossing early Tuesday morning, the Israeli military said, taking "operational control" of the crucial crossing. It's the main route for aid entering the besieged enclave and exit for those able to flee into Egypt.

More than a million people are huddled in tents and overcrowded apartments in Rafah after fleeing Israel's military offensive in other parts of the Gaza Strip. Israel says Rafah is Hamas' last stronghold, but the United States opposes a full-scale invasion of the city bordering Egypt unless Israel provides a "credible" plan for protecting civilians there.

The war in Gaza has driven around 80% of the territory's population of 2.3 million from their homes and caused vast destruction to apartments, hospitals, mosques and schools across several cities. The death toll in Gaza has soared to more than 34,500 people, according to local health officials.

The war began Oct. 7 when Hamas attacked southern Israel, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting about 250 others. Israel says militants still hold around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others.

Currently:

- Israeli forces take control of the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing with Egypt
- The U.N. says there's 'full-blown famine' in northern Gaza. What does that mean?

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- Hamas accepts cease-fire proposal for Gaza, after Israel orders Rafah evacuation ahead of attack.
 - Biden speaks with Netanyahu as Israelis appear closer to major Rafah offensive
 - Bernie Sanders says Gaza may be Joe Biden's Vietnam. But he's ready to battle for Biden over Trump
- Follow AP's coverage of the war at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

Here's the latest:

ISRAELI MILITARY TAKES CONTROL OF THE GAZA SIDE OF THE RAFAH CROSSING WITH EGYPT

JERUSALEM — An Israeli tank brigade has seized control of the Gaza Strip side of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, authorities say, moving forward with an offensive in the southern city even as cease-fire negotiations with Hamas remain on a knife's edge.

The move comes after hours of whiplash in the Israel-Hamas war, with the militant group on Monday saying it accepted an Egyptian-Qatari mediated cease-fire proposal. Israel, meanwhile, insisted the deal did not meet its core demands. The high-stakes diplomatic moves and military brinkmanship left a glimmer of hope alive — but only barely — for an accord that could bring at least a pause in the 7-month-old war that has devastated the Gaza Strip.

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HAMAS PUBLISHES FULL TEXT OF CEASE-FIRE PROPOSAL

BEIRUT — Hamas has published a copy of the cease-fire and hostage release proposal that the militant group said it had agreed to on Monday.

The framework brought forward by Qatar and Egypt aims to bring a halt to seven months of war in Gaza. However, it's unclear if Israel will agree to the terms. The proposal outlines a phased release of Israeli hostages held in Gaza alongside the gradual withdrawal of Israeli troops from the entire enclave and ending with a "sustainable calm" or "permanent cessation of military and hostile operations."

Israel has previously said it would not agree to either a full withdrawal of its forces or a permanent cease-fire as part of a hostage release deal.

The first stage would last 42 days and would involve a partial withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and the release of about 33 hostages held in the territory, including the remaining Israeli women — both civilians and soldiers — as well as children, older adults and people who are ill.

Thirty Palestinian prisoners held in Israel would be released in exchange for each Israeli civilian hostage and 50 in exchange for each female soldier.

Palestinians displaced in Gaza would be allowed to return to their home neighborhoods during that time.

The parties would then negotiate the terms of the next stage, under which the remaining civilian men and soldiers would be released, while Israeli forces would withdraw from the rest of Gaza. This phase would be conditioned on achievement of a "sustainable calm."

The final stage would involve exchange of the bodies of hostages who died in captivity and the beginning of a reconstruction plan for the enclave that would take place over three to five years "under the supervision of a number of countries and organizations, including: Egypt, Qatar and the United Nations."

THOUSANDS PROTEST IN ISRAEL CALLING FOR A DEAL TO RELEASE HOSTAGES

TEL AVIV, Israel — Thousands of Israelis rallied around the country Monday night calling for an immediate deal to release the hostages still held in the Gaza Strip.

The protests came as Israel's War Cabinet voted to begin an operation on the city of Rafah, saying that a cease-fire proposal Hamas accepted earlier in the night was not in line with Israeli demands.

In Tel Aviv, about 1,000 protesters swelled near Israel's military headquarters, some blocking the city's main highway until late into the night. Police tried to clear the road, lifting some protesters off the street and extinguishing fires lit during the demonstration. Other officers on horseback surrounded crowds who chanted "deal now!"

In Jerusalem, hundreds of protesters called for a hostage deal. They marched toward the home of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, holding a banner reading "the blood is on your hands."

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There were also smaller protests in the cities of Haifa, Beersheba and Raanana. Israeli police did not immediately respond to a request about the number of people arrested. In front of Netanyahu's house stood Mai Albini Peri, the grandson of Haim Peri, a hostage in Gaza. He held a sign that read, "Rafah, not at the expense of my grandfather."

From Marseille to Mont-Blanc:

What to know about the journey of the Olympic torch to Paris

By JEROME PUGMIRE AP Sports Writer

The Olympic torch will finally enter France when it reaches the southern seaport of Marseille on Wednesday. And it's already been quite a journey.

After being lit by the sun's rays on April 16 in Ancient Olympia, the torch was carried around Greece before leaving Athens aboard a three-mast ship named Belem, headed for Marseille.

The Belem was first used in 1896, the same year the modern Olympics came back. It will be accompanied by more than 1,000 boats as it parades around the Bay of Marseille, before arriving at the Vieux-Port, or Old Port, and docking on a pontoon resembling an athletics tracks.

Torch bearers will carry the flame across Marseille the next day, the last stretch running on the roof of the famed Stade Vélodrome, home to Marseille's passionate soccer fans.

After leaving Marseille, a vast relay route will be undertaken before the torch odyssey ends on July 27 in Paris.

Here's a look at where the torch goes before reaching Paris:

MONT-SAINT-MICHEL

The torch is due to reach the famed and visually stunning site of Mont Saint-Michel in Normandy on May 31.

Located in an area of raised land surrounded by water, the island fortress looks like it was created for a Game of Thrones film set. But it's real, and very old.

So old that it already existed during the Hundred Years' War between England and France, from 1337 to 1453. An English attack was even fended off. Later it became a prison, and in 1979 it was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Every year swarms of tourists are in awe of its raw and haunting beauty.

ACROSS THE OCEANS

The torch travel route is even more unique considering it takes a detour through France's overseas territories called the Relais des Océans, or Ocean Relay. Riding the waves of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Ocean, it will be in French Guiana on June 9 before hitting New Caledonia on June 11.

Next is the island of Réunion at Saint-Denis — coincidentally the same name as the Paris suburb with the Olympic village — before reaching Papeete in the surfing realm of Tahiti, then Baie-Mahault in Gaudeloupe and finally Fort-de-France in Martinique.

The torch comes back to France on June 18 in the southern city of Nice.

FROM SEA BREEZE TO HEAVY CHEESE

Just five days after landing on French shores, the torch heads up the Alpine mountain pass of Chamonix-Mont-Blanc for Olympic Day on June 23.

The Haute-Savoie region is known for its outstanding Chamonix ski resort, which hosts World Cup races, for sweeping views across glacier fields to nearby Italy, and — some would say more importantly — as a producer of fine cheese.

A Cheese Olympics, should it be invented, would feature a sturdy crew of eight competitors from Savoie: Abondance, Beaufort, Chevrotin, Emmental, Reblochon, Tome, Tomme and the heavy-duty Raclette.

HEADING FOR PARIS

After leaving fromage-friendly Savoie, torch bearers will digest in the Doubs region of eastern France, and then visit the Alsace city of Strasbourg in the northeast.

Three days later the torch will reach Verdun, the site of one of the most horrific battles of World War I.

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From February to December 1916, more than 700,000 French and German soldiers were killed or wounded at the Battle of Verdun.

BASTILLE DAY ARRIVAL

The torch is to arrive on the streets of Paris on July 14 — hardly surprising, considering it's Bastille Day, France's national day.

The torch will stay the following day in Paris, then exit again before snaking back to the French capital via Versailles — home to the resplendent Royal Palace — and the suburbs of Nanterre on July 24 and Seine Saint-Denis on July 25.

From there, it's to travel a very short distance back to Paris on July 26, the eve of the grandiose opening ceremony where athletes will parade on more than 80 boats at sunset on the Seine River.

FINAL DESTINATION?

After the nearly four-hour ceremony ends shortly after 11 p.m., the cauldron will be lit at a location that is being kept top-secret until the day itself. Among reported options are such iconic spots as the Eiffel Tower and the Tuileries Gardens outside the Louvre Museum.

FLAME PROTECTION

A total of 10,000 people will carry the torch along its route. Local police forces on each section of the relay will help to ensure security is high, providing a security bubble around the torch and its carrier.

ECO-FRIENDLY

The torches have a lower environmental impact than those used at previous Games. They burn biogas instead of propane and are recharged when fuel runs out.

Around 2,000 torches will be used compared to more than 10,000 before, according to Georgina Grenon, the director of environmental excellence at Paris 2024. The torches are made with recycled steel and not new aluminum.

Tornado causes extensive damage to small Oklahoma town as powerful storms hit central US

By ALEXA ST. JOHN, SEAN MURPHY and JIM SALTER Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A tornado destroyed homes and toppled trees and power lines when it roared through a small Oklahoma town, one of several twisters that erupted in the central United States amid a series of powerful storms that forecasters warned could stretch into the early hours of Tuesday.

The tornado ripped through the 1,000-person town of Barnsdall, about a 40-minute drive north of Tulsa, on Monday night.

Law enforcement officers and residents surveyed the damage in one neighborhood as lightning flashed and heavy rain came down, local TV news footage showed. The tornado had ripped off the roof of one house before spitting it back out onto the street. Osage County Sheriff Eddie Virden told KOTV that there were no confirmed fatalities as of 11 p.m. local time.

The National Weather Service in Tulsa had warned earlier in the evening that "a large and life-threatening tornado" was headed toward Barnsdall, with wind gusts up to 70 mph (112 kph). Meteorologist Brad McGavock said information on the tornado's size and how far it traveled wasn't immediately available Monday night.

The storms began earlier Monday with gusty winds and rain. But after dark, tornadoes were spotted skirting northern Oklahoma. At one point in the evening, a storm in the small town of Covington had "produced tornadoes off and on for over an hour," the National Weather Service said. Throughout the area, wind farm turbines spun rapidly in the wind and blinding rain.

In Kansas, some areas were pelted by apple-sized hail 3 inches (7.6 centimeters) in diameter.

The storms tore through Oklahoma as areas, including Sulphur and Holdenville, were still recovering from a tornado that killed four and left thousands without power late last month. Both the Plains and Midwest have been hammered by tornadoes this spring.

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Oklahoma's State Emergency Operations Center, which coordinates storm response from a bunker near the state Capitol, remains activated from last weekend's deadly storms.

The Weather Service said more than 3.4 million people, 1,614 schools and 159 hospitals in Oklahoma, portions of southern Kansas and far northern Texas, faced the most severe threat for tornadoes on Monday.

Monte Tucker, a farmer and rancher in the western Oklahoma town of Sweetwater, had spent Monday putting some of his tractors and heavy equipment in barns to protect it from hail. He said he let his neighbors know they could come to his house if the weather becomes dangerous.

"We built a house 10 years ago, and my stubborn wife put her foot down and made sure we built a safe room," Tucker said. He said the entire ground-level room is built with reinforced concrete walls.

Oklahoma and Kansas were under a high-risk weather warning on Monday.

Bill Bunting, deputy director of the Storm Prediction Center, said such a warning from the center is not something seen every day or every spring.

"It's the highest level of threat we can assign," he said.

The last time it was issued was March 31, 2023, when a massive storm system tore through parts of the South and Midwest including Arkansas, Illinois and rural Indiana.

The increased risk is due to an unusual confluence: Winds gusting up to around 75 mph (46 kph) have been blasting through Colorado's populated Front Range region, including the Denver area, on Monday.

The winds are being created by a low pressure system north of Colorado that is also pulling up moisture from the Gulf of Mexico, fueling the risk of severe weather on the Plains, according to the National Weather Service's Denver-area office.

Colorado is not at risk of tornadoes or thunderstorms.

The entire week is looking stormy across the U.S. The eastern U.S. and the South are expected to get the brunt of the bad weather through the rest of the week, including in Indianapolis, Memphis, Nashville, St. Louis and Cincinnati, cities where more than 21 million people live. It should be clear over the weekend.

Meanwhile, floodwaters in the Houston area began receding Monday after days of heavy rain in southeastern Texas left neighborhoods flooded and led to hundreds of high-water rescues.

Police break up pro-Palestinian camp at Amsterdam university as campus protests spread to Europe

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Police arrested some 125 activists as they broke up a pro-Palestinian demonstration camp at the University of Amsterdam in the early hours of Tuesday, as protests that have roiled campuses in the United States spread into Europe.

Police in the Dutch capital said in a statement on the social media platform X that their action was "necessary to restore order" after protests turned violent. There were no immediate reports of injuries.

Video from the scene aired by national broadcaster NOS showed police using a mechanical digger to push down barricades and officers wielding batons and shields moving in to end the demonstration, beating some of the protesters and pulling down tents.

Protesters formed barricades from wooden pallets and bicycles, national broadcaster NOS reported.

Scores of demonstrators occupied a small island at the university on Monday, urging Amsterdam universities to break academic ties with Israel because of its devastating attacks on Gaza in the aftermath of the deadly Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas militants in southern Israel.

There have also been demonstrations in recent days at campuses in France and the United Kingdom.

Photos from the Amsterdam campus Tuesday morning showed tents, banners and food along with piles of cobbles that had been pulled up from the street.

Before police moved in, scuffles broke out Monday night between two rival groups of activists.

Police said in a statement that they cleared the makeshift camp after the protesters refused repeated orders to leave.

"The protest in this form created a very unsafe situation, partly due to the barricades that prevented emergency services from entering the site. In the event of a disaster, the activists themselves could pos-

sibly become stuck on the site," police said.

Police said the campus was calm Tuesday morning, but that officers remained present in the area.

Calls to the university went unanswered early Tuesday and the university did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

India votes in third phase of national elections as PM Modi escalates his rhetoric against Muslims

By KRUTIKA PATHI and SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Millions of Indian voters across 93 constituencies were casting ballots on Tuesday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has mounted an increasingly shrill election campaign, ramping up polarizing rhetoric in incendiary speeches that have targeted the Muslim minority.

In recent campaign rallies, Modi has called Muslims "infiltrators" and said they "have too many children," referring to a Hindu nationalist trope that Muslims produce more children with the aim of outnumbering Hindus in India. He has also accused the rival Indian National Congress party of scheming to "loot" wealth from the country's Hindus and redistribute it among Muslims, who comprise 14% of India's more than 1.4 billion people.

Tuesday's polling in the third round of multi-phase national elections has crucial seats up for grabs in states including Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. Most polls predict a win for Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party, which is up against a broad opposition alliance led by the Congress and powerful regional parties. The staggered election will run until June 1 and votes will be counted on June 4.

Modi, who voted in western Ahmedabad city on Tuesday, had kicked off his campaign with a focus on economic progress, promising he would make India a developed nation by 2047. But in recent weeks, he and the ruling BJP have doubled down heavily on their Hindu nationalism platform, with Modi employing some of his most divisive rhetoric in his decade in power.

Analysts say the change in tone comes as the BJP aims to clinch a supermajority or two-thirds of the 543 seats up for grabs in India's lower Parliament by consolidating votes among the majority Hindu population, who make up 80%. They say Modi's party is also ratcheting up polarizing speeches to distract voters from larger issues, like unemployment and economic distress, that the opposition has focused on.

While India's economy is among the world's fastest growing, many people face growing economic stress. The opposition alliance hopes to tap into this discontent, seeking to galvanize voters on issues like high unemployment, inflation, corruption and low agricultural prices, which have driven two years of farmers' protests.

"The mask has dropped, and I think it is political compulsions that have made them do this," said Ali Khan Mahmudabad, a political science professor at New Delhi's Ashoka University.

Changes in the BJP's campaign may also be a sign of anxiety around low voter turnout it had not anticipated, Mahmudabad said. Voter turnout in the first two phases have been slightly lower than the same rounds in the last election in 2019, according to official data.

"In recent elections, the BJP's wins have been associated with getting the voters out (to vote)," Mahmudabad said. "There may be some fatigue, anti-incumbency or even disenchantment," which has led the BJP to escalate their rhetoric.

Modi, in numerous speeches in recent weeks, has said women's wealth could be at risk if Congress comes to power, claiming the party would snatch away their "mangalsutra" — a sacred gold chain that indicates a Hindu woman's marital status — and give it to its voters, a veiled reference to Muslims. The opposition won't stop there, he has repeatedly claimed, saying the party was conspiring to take away "your property" and "distribute it among selected people."

Others in Modi's party have echoed his remarks. A recent video posted by the BJP on Instagram was more direct. The animated campaign video, which has since been taken down from the social media platform, said if the Congress party comes to power, it will take money and wealth from non-Muslims and

redistribute it to Muslims.

The Congress party and other political opponents have characterized Modi's remarks as "hate speech" that could fan religious tensions. They have also filed complaints with India's election commission, which is overseeing the polls, for breaching rules that ban candidates from appealing to "caste or communal feelings" to secure votes.

The commission can issue warnings and suspend candidates for a period of time over violations of the code of conduct, but it has issued no warnings to Modi so far.

Modi's critics say India's tradition of diversity and secularism has come under attack since the prime minister and his party rose to power a decade ago. While there have long been tensions between India's majority Hindu community and Muslims, rights groups say that attacks against minorities have become more brazen under Modi.

The party denies the accusation and says its policies benefit all Indians.

Mahmudabad, the political scientist, said Modi's party had counted on getting votes from the fervor over a Hindu temple that was built atop a razed mosque that Modi opened in January. Many saw the glitzy spectacle as the unofficial start of his election campaign.

"Instead, people are talking about inflation, unemployment and economic distress," Mahmudabad said. "And so in order to galvanize and consolidate their vote, the BJP has raised the specter of Muslims."

Pro-Palestinian protesters retake MIT encampment, occupy building at Rhode Island School of Design

By KAREN MATTHEWS and STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A Monday deadline for pro-Palestinian protesters to leave an encampment at Massachusetts Institute of Technology cleared many demonstrators only to have the site retaken while protesters at the Rhode Island School of Design began occupying a building in the ongoing protest movement connected to the Israel-Hamas war.

At MIT, protesters were given an afternoon deadline in which to voluntarily leave the protest site or face suspension. Many left, according to an MIT spokesperson, who said protesters breached fencing after the arrival of demonstrators from outside the university. On Monday night, dozens of protesters remained at the encampment in a calmer atmosphere, listening to speakers and chanting before taking a pizza dinner break.

Sam Ihns, a graduate student at MIT studying mechanical engineering and a member of MIT Jews for a Ceasefire, said the group has been at the encampment for the past two weeks and that they were calling for an end to the killing in Gaza.

"Specifically, our encampment is protesting MIT's direct research ties to the Israeli Ministry of Defense," he said.

Earlier in the day Erica Caple James, a professor of medical anthropology and urban studies at MIT, attended the protests as a faculty observer and an adviser to the Alliance of Concerned Faculty.

"My hope is that the day ends without harm befalling anyone, without there being physical violence and hopefully with space to open negotiations again between the administration and students, faculty and staff who are concerned about MIT's global influence," she said.

No arrests had been made as of Monday night, according to the MIT spokesperson.

At the Rhode Island School of Design, where students started occupying a building Monday, a spokesperson said the school affirms students' rights to freedom of speech and peaceful assembly and that they support all members of their community. The RISD president and provost were on site meeting with the demonstrators, the spokesperson said.

Demonstrations at Columbia University, where the protest movement began about three weeks ago, have roiled its campus. Officials on Monday canceled its large main ceremony, but said students will be able to celebrate at a series of smaller, school-based ceremonies this week and next.

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The decision comes as universities around the country wrangle with how to handle commencements for students whose high school graduations were derailed by COVID-19 in 2020. Another campus shaken by protests, Emory University, announced Monday that it would move its commencement from its Atlanta campus to a suburban arena. Others, including the University of Michigan, Indiana University and Northeastern, have pulled off ceremonies with few disruptions.

Columbia's decision to cancel its main ceremonies scheduled for May 15 saves its president, Minouche Shafik, from having to deliver a commencement address in the same part of campus where police dismantled a protest encampment last week. The Ivy League school in upper Manhattan said it made the decision after discussions with students.

Columbia had already canceled in-person classes. More than 200 pro-Palestinian demonstrators who had camped out on Columbia's green or occupied an academic building were arrested in recent weeks.

Similar encampments sprouted up elsewhere as universities struggled with where to draw the line between allowing free expression while maintaining safe and inclusive campuses.

The University of Southern California earlier canceled its main graduation ceremony. Students abandoned their camp at USC on Sunday after being surrounded by police and threatened with arrest.

Other universities have held graduation ceremonies with beefed-up security. The University of Michigan's ceremony was interrupted by chanting a few times Saturday.

Emory's ceremonies scheduled for May 13 will be held almost 20 miles (30 kilometers) northeast of the university's Atlanta campus, President Gregory Fenves said in an open letter.

"Please know that this decision was not taken lightly," Fenves wrote. "It was made in close consultation with the Emory Police Department, security advisors and other agencies — each of which advised against holding commencement events on our campuses."

The 16,000-student university is one of many that has seen repeated protests stemming from the conflict that started Oct. 7 when Hamas militants attacked southern Israel, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking roughly 250 hostages. Student protesters are calling on their schools to divest from companies that do business with Israel or otherwise contribute to the war effort.

Vowing to destroy Hamas, Israel launched an offensive in Gaza that has killed more than 34,500 Palestinians, about two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. Israeli strikes have devastated the enclave and displaced most of its inhabitants.

Hamas on Monday announced its acceptance of an Egyptian-Qatari cease-fire proposal, but Israel said the deal did not meet its "core demands" and that it was pushing ahead with an assault on the southern Gaza town of Rafah.

"Cease-fires are temporary," said Selina Al-Shihabi, a Georgetown University sophomore who was taking part in a protest at George Washington. "There can be a cease-fire, but the U.S. government will continue to arm the Israeli military. We plan to be here until the university divests or until they drag us out of here."

At the University of California, San Diego, police cleared an encampment and arrested more than 64 people, including 40 students.

The University of California, Los Angeles, moved all classes online for the week due to ongoing disruptions following the dismantling of an encampment last week which resulted in 44 reported arrests.

Chancellor Gene Block said Monday night that UCLA's newly appointed chief safety officer would lead an investigation to identify and prosecute the "group of instigators" who led a violent attack on pro-Palestinian demonstrators on April 30. The university has asked Los Angeles police, the FBI and the district attorney's office for assistance, Block said.

Schools are trying various tactics from appeasement to threats of disciplinary action to get protesters to take down encampments or move to other areas of campus.

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago said in a Facebook post Sunday that it offered protesters "amnesty from academic sanction and trespassing charges" if they moved and that many protesters voluntarily left.

"Those that remained were arrested," the school said.

A group of faculty and staff members at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill asked the adminis-

tration for amnesty for student protesters who were recently arrested and suspended. UNC Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine said in a media advisory that it would deliver a letter on behalf of more than 500 faculty who support the student activists.

Harvard University's interim president, Alan Garber, warned students that those participating in a pro-Palestinian encampment in Harvard Yard could face "involuntary leave." That means they would not be allowed on campus, could lose their student housing and may not be able to take exams, Garber said.

Bernie Sanders says Gaza may be Joe Biden's Vietnam. But he's ready to battle for Biden over Trump

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In April, Bernie Sanders repeatedly stood shoulder to shoulder with President Joe Biden, promoting their joint accomplishments on health care and climate at formal White House events while eviscerating Donald Trump in a widely viewed campaign TikTok video.

Then just last week, Sanders was bluntly warning that the crisis in Gaza could be Biden's "Vietnam" and invoking President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision not to run for reelection as the nation was in an uproar over his support of that war.

Such is the political dichotomy of Bernie Sanders when it comes to Joe Biden. They are two octogenarians who share a bond that was forged through a hard-fought primary in 2020 and fortified through policy achievements over the last three years.

Now, in this election year, Sanders will be Biden's most powerful emissary to progressives and younger voters — a task that will test the senator's pull with the sectors of the Democratic Party most disillusioned with the president and his policies, especially on Gaza.

Privately, Sanders has felt less enthusiastic in recent days about making the political case on Biden's behalf as the Gaza crisis worsened, according to a person familiar with Sanders' sentiments. Still, Sanders remains adamant that the specter of Trump's return to the Oval Office is too grave a threat and stresses that "this election is not between Joe Biden and God. It is between Joe Biden and Donald Trump."

"I understand that a lot of people in this country are less than enthusiastic about Biden for a number of reasons and I get that. And I strongly disagree with him, especially on what's going on in Gaza," Sanders said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

But Sanders continued: "You have to have a certain maturity when you deal with politics and that is yes, you can disagree with somebody. That doesn't mean you can vote for somebody else who could be the most dangerous person in American history, or not vote and allow that other guy to win."

That will be the thrust of the message that Sanders will carry through November, even as progressive furor over Biden's handling of the war in Gaza continues to escalate, protests continue to fester and Sanders' own critiques of the administration's policy become more pointed.

Few can doubt Sanders' influence throughout the Biden presidency. Once rivals for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020, the two men later joined forces to assemble half a dozen policy task forces that underpinned the party's policy platform later that year.

That laid the groundwork for a burst of ambitious policymaking in the first two years of the Biden administration, from a sweeping \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package in early 2021 to legislation in the summer of 2022 that was a mishmash of longstanding Democratic priorities, including cheaper prescription drugs for Medicare beneficiaries.

More than three years into Biden's term, Sanders' connections throughout the West Wing are deep. He chats regularly not only with the president, but his top aides, including White House chief of staff Jeff Zients, senior adviser Anita Dunn and national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

"He doesn't mince words," Dunn said. "He's very direct with us, pretty blunt, and that's a good thing."

Yet some Democrats are worried that anger among progressives over Gaza is so deep that not even Sanders can persuade them to support Biden. A persistent bloc of voters in multiple primaries continues to choose "uncommitted" or a variant to protest Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas war, sometimes far

surpassing Biden's margin of victory in those same states in the 2020 general election.

"This campaign is in trouble. And Sen. Sanders will do everything — again, everything — that he can to try to pull this man over the finish line," said Nina Turner, who was a national co-chair of Sanders' 2020 campaign. "I'm not so sure it's going to work this time."

Mitch Landrieu, a national co-chair for the Biden campaign, told CNN that Sanders' comparisons to the Vietnam War were an "over-exaggeration." A March poll conducted by the Harvard Institute of Politics found that 18- to 29-year-olds were less likely to say the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the national issue that concerned them most, compared to issues like the economy, immigration and abortion.

But it isn't just on Gaza that Sanders has been pushing Biden and his aides. He's urging them to shift campaign strategy to not just contrast Biden with Trump but to lay out ambitious goals on health care, education, child care and workers' rights.

Biden's State of the Union address, which his advisers point to as a roadmap for his second term, was a "general start," Sanders said, but he added that Biden has to do more to inspire voters.

Yet top advisers to the president, long a stalwart of the Democratic center-left, and Sanders, the undisputed leader of the party's progressive wing, say the two men share more traits than their ideological stances would indicate.

For one, they both hold a core belief that government should be a force for good. Their political careers are anchored in small, sparsely populated states that exposed them to the most hyperlocal and grassroots of politics. They have a sense of pragmatism about working within the political system's realities, even if Sanders works to push those boundaries and Biden governs inside of them.

Biden, as vice president, was the rare establishment Democrat who was warm to Sanders during the senator's first presidential bid.

"I know he felt that while there was a lot of hostility within the Democratic Party and in the top ranks ... he felt warmth and positivity from Joe Biden," said Faiz Shakir, who served as campaign manager for Sanders' 2020 campaign and remains a close political adviser.

Now, Sanders is determined to ensure Trump doesn't win again.

"I see this as an enormously important election that I for one will not sit out," Sanders said. "I'll be active."

Why voters in southern India are more resistant to Modi's Hindu-centric politics

By SIBI ARASU and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

CHENNAI, India (AP) — Prime Minister Narendra Modi has wielded near-total control over Indian politics since coming to power 10 years ago, with one exception: He has failed to win over the country's wealthier southern region.

Five states across southern India account for roughly 20% of the country's population and 30% of its economy. They are the heartbeat of India's manufacturing and high-tech sectors. They are ethnically diverse and proudly multilingual. They empower women with educational and employment opportunities and have a long history of progressive politics.

Not one of them is controlled by Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party — a stark rejection of its Hindu-nationalist agenda that enjoys wide support in northern India.

The BJP is expected to win India's election when results are announced in June, delivering Modi another five years as prime minister. But the odds are also high of strong resistance in the south. That would deny Modi his ambition of uniting all of India behind him and limit how far he can push the BJP agenda of promoting one religion and language over others.

"If you conceive of a Hindi-speaking, unified civilization as the reason you exist, then that becomes a significant barrier for you to cross," data scientist and political analyst Neelakantan R.S. said.

Voters and leaders of India's southern states have different needs than their counterparts in the north, which is more rural and populous. One thing they want is greater recognition from the Modi government of the key role their region plays in advancing the country's economy.

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They feel their outsized contribution to India's tax base is betrayed by Modi's preferential treatment for poorer northern states, which receive a disproportionate amount of government funds for development projects and social welfare programs.

Modi's injection of religion into politics only exacerbates tensions with many southern voters.

Despite the strong opposition, Modi is campaigning aggressively in the south. His goal is for the BJP to win enough seats in the lower house of parliament to secure a two-thirds majority. That much power could embolden the party to try changing the constitution to serve its Hindu-centric goals, political analyst Kavitha Muralidharan said.

"A super majority is what they need to launch a full-scale, pan-India, Hindutva experiment," Muralidharan said, referring to the century-old ideology guiding Modi.

MODI'S SOUTHERN STRATEGY

Modi has made some 20 trips this year to five southern states: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Telangana. They control roughly a quarter of the 543 seats in the lower house of parliament — and if the BJP can win just a few more than the 29 seats it won from these states in 2019, its super majority is within reach.

But experts are skeptical this will happen because southern voters have deep connections to regional political parties that have dominated for decades and are the BJP's toughest electoral opponents nationwide.

Modi is heavily focused on the southernmost state, Tamil Nadu, where the BJP did not win any of its 39 seats up for grabs in the 2019 election.

On a recent visit there, Modi wore the region's traditional white silk garment -- a veshti -- wrapped around his lower body, and he used artificial intelligence software to have his speeches translated in real-time from Hindi to Tamil.

"As the world's oldest language, Tamil fills us with immense pride," Modi said recently, making an apparent effort to tamp down rumors that the BJP wants to impose the Hindi language on the state.

Still, Dileep Kumar, a computer engineer in Bengaluru, said voters in Tamil Nadu are wary. "I can't go and say to a Hindi guy, brother, please quit your Hindi and start talking in Tamil. That's not going to work, will it?" he said.

One BJP candidate running for parliament in the state's capital of Chennai believes the party has its best shot in years at gaining support.

"His frequent visits are helping us," Tamilsai Soundararajan said. "People here were electrified when they saw the prime minister."

But the incumbent she's up against is doubtful. Hindu-centric politics won't resonate in a place with a long history of social justice and equal rights movements, said Thamizhachi Thangapandian, a retired college professor who is a member of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party, the BJP's strongest rival in Tamil Nadu.

The beat of drums and firecrackers welcomed Thangapandian as she greeted voters recently riding an open-roofed tuk-tuk through Chennai's alleyways. The achievements of her party blared through a set of speakers, including a reference to keeping out the "religion crazy" BJP.

Modi routinely mentions on the campaign trail the recent construction of a Hindu temple atop a razed mosque, but the issue doesn't animate voters in southern India like it does elsewhere.

Southern India is home to some of the country's most visited temples and has millions of Hindu devotees. What sets it apart, experts say, is that religion hasn't been weaponized for political gain.

"People are religious here," said Muralidharan, the political analyst. "But it doesn't convert into a frenzy."

The BJP's religious zealotry makes leaders in the region nervous because of its potential to create a "disturbance to the peace" in a place with a global reputation as a good place to do business, said G Sundararajan, a robotics entrepreneur in Chennai, where Hyundai and Foxconn (the maker of Apple iPhones) have located factories.

"Investors prefer Tamil Nadu precisely because its peaceful, has a large educated labor force and support from local government," he said.

Modi tempers his Hindu-nationalist rhetoric while visiting the south, focusing his speeches instead on

economics. For example, he has promised to build a high-speed rail line that would run through southern India and to help develop fisheries and auto manufacturing.

TENSION OVER REDISTRIBUTING WEALTH

The economy of southern India is more industrialized than the north, its cities are more urbanized, and its youth are more educated.

Southern Indian cities have also become a magnet for global technology companies seeking to diversify beyond China, including Apple and Google. The vast potential for India's economy, now the world's fifth-largest, is a point of pride for Modi.

But political leaders in southern India feel short-changed by Modi.

Tamil Nadu, India's second-wealthiest state, receives far less in return for every rupee in taxes it pays compared with poorer northern states like Uttar Pradesh or Bihar, which receive government investments equal to two or three times the amount they pay in taxes.

This tension over the redistribution of wealth from south to north existed long before Modi came to power. But the BJP has made it worse.

Southern leaders believe Modi's priorities lie in the north, where he derives the bulk of his support. They worry that the BJP government will snatch away even more decision-making power from states if their majority grows, said Muralidharan.

Southern leaders have protested against the Modi government for holding up development funding, for misusing federal agencies to target political opponents in the region, and for not sending enough emergency relief after natural disasters.

And they believe their fight against the BJP and Modi is existential.

"In southern India, the threat of being reduced to a vassal state is a serious problem," said Neelakantan, the political analyst.

Trump faces jail threat over gag order as prosecutors zero in on transactions at heart of the case

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, ERIC TUCKER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump returns to his hush money trial Tuesday facing a threat of jail time for additional gag order violations as prosecutors gear up to summon big-name witnesses in the final weeks of the case.

Stormy Daniels, the porn actor who has said she had a sexual encounter with Trump, and Michael Cohen, the former Trump lawyer and personal fixer who prosecutors say paid her to keep silent in the final weeks of the 2016 presidential campaign, are among those who have yet to take the stand but are expected to in the coming weeks.

The jury on Monday heard from two witnesses, including a former Trump Organization controller who provided a mechanical but vital recitation of how the company reimbursed payments that were allegedly meant to suppress embarrassing stories from surfacing and then logged them as legal expenses in a manner that Manhattan prosecutors say broke the law.

The testimony from Jeffrey McConney yielded an important building block for prosecutors trying to pull back the curtain on what they say was a corporate records cover-up of transactions designed to protect Trump's presidential bid during a pivotal stretch of the race. It focused on a \$130,000 payment from Cohen to Daniels and the subsequent reimbursement Cohen received.

McConney and another witness testified that the reimbursement checks were drawn from Trump's personal account. Yet even as jurors witnessed the checks and other documentary evidence, prosecutors did not elicit testimony Monday showing that Trump himself dictated that the payments would be logged as legal expenses, a designation that prosecutors contend was intentionally deceptive.

McConney acknowledged during cross-examination that Trump never asked him to log the reimbursements as legal expenses or discussed the matter with him at all. Another witness, Deborah Tarasoff, a Trump Organization accounts payable supervisor, said under questioning that she did not get permission

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to cut the checks in question from Trump himself.

"You never had any reason to believe that President Trump was hiding anything or anything like that?" Trump attorney Todd Blanche asked.

"Correct," Tarasoff replied.

The testimony followed a stern warning from Judge Juan M. Merchan that additional violations of a gag order barring Trump from inflammatory out-of-court comments about witnesses, jurors and others closely connected to the case could result in jail time.

The \$1,000 fine imposed Monday marks the second time since the trial began last month that Trump has been sanctioned for violating the gag order. He was fined \$9,000 last week, \$1,000 for each of nine violations.

"It appears that the \$1,000 fines are not serving as a deterrent. Therefore going forward, this court will have to consider a jail sanction," Merchan said before jurors were brought into the courtroom. Trump's statements, the judge added, "threaten to interfere with the fair administration of justice and constitute a direct attack on the rule of law. I cannot allow that to continue."

Trump sat forward in his seat, glowering at the judge as he handed down the ruling. When the judge finished speaking, Trump shook his head twice and crossed his arms.

Yet even as Merchan warned of jail time in his most pointed and direct admonition, he also made clear his reservations about a step that he described as a "last resort."

"The last thing I want to do is put you in jail," Merchan said. "You are the former president of the United States and possibly the next president as well. There are many reasons why incarceration is truly a last resort for me. To take that step would be disruptive to these proceedings."

The latest violation stems from an April 22 interview with television channel Real America's Voice in which Trump criticized the speed at which the jury was picked and claimed, without evidence, that it was stacked with Democrats.

Prosecutors are continuing to build toward their star witness, Cohen, who pleaded guilty to federal charges related to the hush money payments. He is expected to undergo a bruising cross-examination from defense attorneys seeking to undermine his credibility with jurors.

The Met Gala was in full bloom with Zendaya, Jennifer Lopez, Mindy Kaling among the standout stars

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Met Gala and its fashionista A-listers on Monday included Jennifer Lopez, Zendaya and a parade of others in a swirl of flora and fauna looks on a green-tinged carpet lined by live foliage.

Lopez went for silver leaves in a second-skin goddess gown and Zendaya was all vamp and fantasy in a rare double appearance on the steps of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Both were co-chairs of the annual fundraiser, and both received cheers from the crowd of fashion enthusiasts packed behind barriers outside.

Lopez (in Schiaparelli) was all va-va-voom in a near-naked gown. She's got the Met Gala down: It's her 14th.

Zendaya put on her fashion face in peacock hues of blue and green, with a head piece to match and leaf accents. The look was Maison Margiela by John Galliano. She walked again to close the carpet in black Givenchy Haute Couture gown also by Galliano with a head piece stuffed with flowers by Alexander McQueen.

It's been five years since Zendaya last attended the gala. Lopez went with Tiffany & Co. diamonds, including a stunning bird motif necklace with a diamond of over 20 carats at its center.

Flowers were everywhere, in line with this year's theme: "The Garden of Time," inspired by J.G. Ballard's 1962 short story of the same name.

Mindy Kaling is sure to make the best-dressed lists in sand-colored swirls that towered over her head

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at the back. No worries about dinner. The back was removable. Her look was by Indian couturier Gaurav Gupta.

Usher held a single red rose in a dark and eery black suit and cape, a wide-brim black hat on his head and a black brooch on one lapel. The look was Alexander McQueen by Seán McGirr.

FASHION KINGS AND QUEENS ... AND A GOOD WITCH

Gigi Hadid brought the drama in a look by the drama king himself, Thom Browne. Her white gown was adorned with 2.8 million microbeads with yellow flowers and green thorns. She was high glam in a wavy bob and crimson lips.

If there's a queen of the Met Gala besides the evening's mastermind, Anna Wintour, it's Sarah Jessica Parker. The long-time attendee takes each year's theme seriously, researching every detail. This year she was in an Alice in Wonderland look with a lavender overlay and a Philip Treacy topper on her head. The dress was by Richard Quinn. Her long hair tumbled behind her back in beachy waves, a look that built into a beauty trend of the evening.

If Parker is a queen, Ayo Edebiri is a gala baby. It was her first one and she showed out in a youthful white look fading into a garden full of colorful flowers at the bottom by Loewe.

Serena Williams took metallic gold to another level in a shining one-shoulder statement look. Ariana Grande was all Glinda the Good Witch, making the most of her pale-colored strapless Loewe look with 3D eyelashes at the side of each eye. She arrived with her "Wicked" co-star Cynthia Erivo, dressed in black with pink petals in a darker, edgy look by Thom Browne.

Cardi B., who has THE most fun at the Met Gala, struck a pose or three in a statement black gown with a huge tulle train. It was by Windowsen. She paired the look with green jewels and a high black turban. She needed multiple helpers to move her dress up the stairs.

CHANNELING SLEEPING BEAUTY AND THE GARDEN

Penelope Cruz, meanwhile, went goth in black by Chanel. It had a bustier top and a Sleeping Beauty-like off-shoulder silhouette. There was another Sleeping Beauty-ish guest: Kendall Jenner in a Givenchy look done by Alexander McQueen in 1999.

Kendall's sister, Kylie Jenner, was more Old Hollywood than storybook in a chic Oscar de la Renta low-cut strapless look, a white bloom in her clicked-back updo and a train behind. Oddly, older sister Kim Kardashian tightly covered up her gorgeous silver corset look with a leaf motif by Maison Margiela with a lumpy gray sweater.

Dua Lipa was a whole different kind of princess. She went full rock 'n' roll in black by Marc Jacobs, who accompanied her. Her lace and feather look was slow slung at the hip with a deep plunge at the neck.

The princess vibes were in apparent reference to the Met's spring exhibition that the gala kicks off. It's called "Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion." While it doesn't actually have to do with Disney, or even princesses, some of the 400 guests went there.

Amid all the princesses was the Mad Hatter, Barry Keoghan, in an earthy Burberry velvet Victorian look with a high-necked bow shirt underneath. He, of course, had a top hat.

Demi Moore stuck to the garden in a Harris Reed look with huge wings encircled by arrows and hand-painted with pink and white blooms.

Diesel broke through on the gala carpet on Dove Cameron. It was about as unlike Diesel as it gets, also going for the garden. The look had sleeves attached to her train.

FINDING DEEPER MEANING IN THE THEME

Lily Gladstone went for black by Gabriela Hearst.

"We wanted me to feel draped in the power of my ancestors," she said. "For Kiowa and Blackfeet, our ancestors are the stars, that's where we come from. ... I feel like it's so long overdue that we have so much Indigenous representation and this sort of upper echelon world of high luxury fashion, because that is our aesthetic, you know, Natives have always loved luxury."

Brooke Bobb, fashion news director for Harper's Bazaar, saw a multitude of meanings in all of the evening's black and florals.

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"There was a lot of black, perhaps a gothic ode to the 'Sleeping Beauties' title of the actual exhibition but also maybe an accidental nod to the fact that in this chaotic world we're living in right now, not everything, not even fabulous, prime-time televised fashion, is coming up roses," she said.

There was no Rihanna and no Taylor Swift.

"Zendaya came out swinging for a second time in a finale look to close the carpet but overall, the whole red carpet experience felt like it was stuck in some odd time warp, somewhere between the Met Gala's glory days and the now, a moment when the camp of it all and social media vitality tend to override fashion for the pure love of fashion," Bobb said.

FLORAL LOOKS AND A SPECIAL PLUS-1

Colman Domingo donned a white jacket with a cape and extra-wide trousers, holding a bouquet of white calla lilies, while Tyla chose a Balmain gown made to look like sand using actual sand on fabric molded to her body. She needed help with the hourglass she held as she made her way up the museum stairs. Domingo's designer was Willy Chavarria.

Sam Smith wore silver and gold metal roses tucked into the waist of a jacket, and Jack Harlow also channeled florals, but subtly with a silver and pearl floral boutonniere.

Wintour wore a black coat adorned with multicolored flowers by Loewe. Her fellow co-chair Bad Bunny donned all black custom Maison Margiela Artisanal by John Galliano.

Among those who had way BIG fun with the nature and garden theme was Lana Del Rey. She walked up the museum steps as an actual tree, her face shrouded by fabric held up by her branches. The look was by Alexander McQueen.

A pregnant Lea Michele wore Rodarte, inspired by the brand's 2012 spring/summer collection.

"I'm honored to be here and bring my baby with me," Michele said. "I don't think I was allowed a plus one, but I'm bringing" one, she said with a laugh. "I'm so grateful. I feel really beautiful, you know, in this pregnancy."

Nicki Minaj also went out of the box in a bright metallic yellow dress with large flowers dangling and bobbing as she moved.

EARLY REACTIONS TO THIS YEAR'S MET GALA LOOKS

Larry Curran, a stylist and independent brand consultant, saw big wins among a specific brand: "Is this the year people stop asking how to pronounce Loewe?"

It's Loo-'wev-ay.

Danielle James, beauty director for Elle.com, said top trends of the night also included bold blush and baby bangs.

"I loved seeing Ayo Edebiri's berry cheeks, taking the strawberry makeup trend to another level. Nell Diamond gave us a flush of poppy-red on her cheeks. Gigi Hadid's gave us an eye-catching look with bold red cheeks and a bold red lip that we'll be sure to see on many nights out this summer. After seasons of no makeup makeup and minimalist looks, color is here!"

Tornadoes spotted in Oklahoma as hail pelts Kansas.

Forecasts warn more is to come

By ALEXA ST. JOHN, SEAN MURPHY and JIM SALTER Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Tornadoes touched down Monday evening in rural Oklahoma and large hail pelted parts of Kansas as an outbreak of dangerous storms brought the possibility of strong twisters staying on the ground for many miles.

Forecasters have issued a rare high-risk weather warning for the two states.

"You can't rely on waiting to see tornadoes before sheltering tonight," the National Weather Service said.

At least four tornadoes had been spotted in north central Oklahoma, including one about a 45-minute drive north of Tulsa. The National Weather Service office there issued a tornado emergency alert Monday night for the nearby towns of Bartlesville, Dewey and Barnsdall.

The Weather Service warned "a large and life-threatening tornado" was headed toward those towns,

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with wind gusts up to 70 mph.

Other tornadoes had been spotted earlier in the evening near the 1,000-person town of Okeene, while another storm in Covington had "produced tornadoes off and on for over an hour."

The greatest risk of damaging weather includes areas in Oklahoma, such as Sulphur and Holdenville, still recovering from a tornado that killed four and left thousands without power late last month. Both the Plains and Midwest have been hammered by tornadoes this spring.

A dispatcher for Kingfisher County, Oklahoma, said there was a report of tornado damage to a single home, but it wasn't immediately known if anyone was in the home or if anyone was hurt. Throughout the area, wind farm turbines spun rapidly in the wind and blinding rain.

Meanwhile, apple-sized hail of 3 inches (7.62 centimeters) in diameter was reported near Ellinwood, Kansas, a town of about 2,000 residents 100 miles (161 kilometers) northwest of Wichita.

The Weather Service said that more than 3.4 million people, 1,614 schools and 159 hospitals in Oklahoma, portions of southern Kansas and far north Texas, face the most severe threat for tornadoes.

Schools and colleges across the state, including the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City Public Schools and several metro-area school districts, shut down early and canceled late afternoon and evening classes and activities.

Oklahoma's State Emergency Operations Center, which coordinates storm response from a bunker near the state Capitol, remains activated from last weekend's deadly storms, and the state's commissioner of public safety told state agencies to let most of their workers across Oklahoma leave early on Monday.

Monte Tucker, a farmer and rancher in the far western Oklahoma town of Sweetwater, spent Monday putting some of his tractors and heavy equipment in barns to protect it from hail and letting his neighbors know they can come to his house if the weather becomes dangerous.

"We built a house 10 years ago, and my stubborn wife put her foot down and made sure we built a safe room," Tucker said. He said the entire ground-level room is built with reinforced concrete walls.

Bill Bunting, deputy director of the Storm Prediction Center, said a high risk from the center is not something seen every day or every spring.

"It's the highest level of threat we can assign. And it's a day to take very, very seriously," he said.

The last time a high risk was issued was March 31, 2023, when a massive storm system tore through parts of the South and Midwest including Arkansas, Illinois and rural Indiana.

The risk on Monday in parts of the southern Plains is the worst in five years, AccuWeather Chief Meteorologist Jon Porter said.

"If you look at a meteorology textbook about how to get a significant tornado outbreak in the southern Plains, all the ingredients you need are here today," Porter said.

The number of storms and their intensity should increase quickly in the evening hours across western parts of Oklahoma and up into south-central Kansas, Bunting said.

"The kinds of tornadoes that this storm can produce are particularly intense, and they can be long-lasting," Porter said. "These are the tornadoes that sometimes can last for 45 minutes or an hour, even more, creating paths of destruction as they move along."

The high risk is due to an unusual confluence: Winds gusting up to around 75 mph (46.60 kph) have been blasting through Colorado's populated Front Range region, including the Denver area, on Monday.

The winds are being created by a low pressure system north of Colorado that is also pulling up moisture from the Gulf of Mexico, fueling the risk of severe weather on the Plains, said Greg Heavener, warning coordination meteorologist at the National Weather Service's Denver-area office.

Colorado is not at risk of tornadoes or thunderstorms, he said.

The dangerous Plains weather will move east, potentially creating overnight risk in places like Kansas City and Springfield in Missouri through early Tuesday, Porter said.

"This is not going to be a atmospheric setup where the sun is going to go down and the thunderstorms are going to wane and there's going to be no additional risk," noted Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini.

The entire week is looking stormy across the U.S. The eastern U.S. and the South are expected to get

the brunt of the bad weather through the rest of the week, including in Indianapolis, Memphis, Nashville, St. Louis and Cincinnati, where more than 21 million people live. It should be clear over the weekend.

Meanwhile, floodwaters in the Houston area began receding Monday after days of heavy rain in southeastern Texas left neighborhoods flooded and led to hundreds of high-water rescues.

Biden warns Netanyahu against major Rafah offensive as divide between the 2 leaders grows

By ZEKE MILLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Monday urgently warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu against launching an offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah as the divide between the two leaders continues to grow along with the mounting Palestinian death toll.

The call between Biden and Netanyahu came as Israel appeared to be moving closer to a major military operation to root out Hamas militants in Rafah — something that Biden and his top aides have repeatedly told Israeli officials will only lead to more death and worsen the despair in the war-ravaged territory.

Both leaders are facing growing public pressure — Biden from protests on college campuses and Netanyahu from the families of some Israeli hostages — for a cease-fire deal.

“The president doesn’t want to see operations in Rafah that put at greater risk the more than a million people that are seeking refuge there,” White House national security spokesman John Kirby said.

The White House described the leaders’ 30-minute conversation as “constructive.” Privately, however, administration officials’ concern was mounting as Israel on Monday ordered about 100,000 Palestinians to evacuate from Rafah and began carrying out “targeted” strikes in the eastern part of the city.

White House officials were carefully watching the unfolding, intensified Israeli action in Rafah with deep worry, but did not believe it amounted to the widescale attack Netanyahu has been threatening, according to a person familiar with administration thinking who was not authorized to comment publicly.

More than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war that started after Hamas launched an attack on Israel on Oct. 7 that killed 1,200. Some 250 people were also taken hostage in the brazen attack.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation is rapidly deteriorating in huge swaths of Gaza. The head of the United Nations World Food Program, Cindy McCain, said Sunday that northern Gaza has entered “full-blown famine” after nearly seven months of war.

Ahead of the leaders’ call, Israel announced it was ordering Palestinians to begin evacuating from Rafah. Soon after the order, Hamas said in a statement it has accepted an Egyptian-Qatari proposal for a cease-fire.

Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said Israel would continue its operations in Gaza as officials deliberate the cease-fire proposal approved by Hamas. And the Israeli War Cabinet voted unanimously to approve a Rafah military operation but said it would continue cease-fire efforts.

The new targeted strikes in eastern Rafah appeared aimed at keeping the pressure on Hamas as talks continue.

Kirby said Biden had been briefed on Hamas’ response that it would accept a hostage deal. CIA Director William Burns, who was in Qatar for hostage talks with regional officials, was discussing the Hamas statement with allies in the region. Kirby declined to discuss the parameters of what Hamas is saying it has agreed to.

“Bill Burns is looking at that response. He’s talking to the Israelis about it,” Kirby told reporters. “And we’ll see where this goes. Hopefully, it can lead to those hostages getting out real, real soon.”

In recent days, Egyptian and Hamas officials have said the cease-fire would take place in a series of stages during which Hamas would release hostages it is holding in exchange for Israeli troop pullbacks from Gaza.

Biden also told Netanyahu he still believes reaching a cease-fire with Hamas is the best way to protect the lives of Israeli hostages held in Gaza, officials said. Israel says Hamas is holding about 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others in Gaza. The leaders’ call occurred before Hamas announced it had accepted a cease-fire proposal.

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Following his call with Netanyahu, Biden hosted King Abdullah II of Jordan for a private lunch meeting at the White House for talks on the war and hostage talks. Jordan's embassy in Washington said in a posting on the social media site X after the meeting that Abdullah warned that an Israeli operation on Rafah "threatens to lead to a new massacre."

On Sunday, Netanyahu rejected international pressure to halt the war in Gaza in a fiery speech marking the country's annual Holocaust memorial day, declaring, "If Israel is forced to stand alone, Israel will stand alone."

"I say to the leaders of the world: No amount of pressure, no decision by any international forum will stop Israel from defending itself," he said, speaking in English. "Never again is now."

In their phone call, Netanyahu told Biden he would ensure the Kerem Shalom crossing between Gaza and Israel would remain open for humanitarian aid deliveries, according to the White House.

Israeli officials last week briefed Biden administration officials on a plan to evacuate Palestinian civilians ahead of a potential operation, according to U.S. officials familiar with the matter.

Pentagon press secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder said Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin had previously stressed with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant that Israel needed a "credible plan" to evacuate those civilians and maintain humanitarian aid. Ryder said Austin had seen "the concepts" from the Israelis on their plan for an operation in Rafah "but nothing detailed at this point."

Pro-Palestinian protesters break through barricades to retake MIT encampment

By KAREN MATTHEWS and STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Pro-Palestinian protesters that had been blocked by police from accessing an encampment at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on Monday broke through fencing, linked arms and encircled tents that remained there, as Columbia University canceled its university-wide commencement ceremony following weeks of demonstrations.

Sam Ihns, a graduate student at MIT studying mechanical engineering and a member of MIT Jews for a Ceasefire, said the group has been at the encampment for the past two weeks and that they were calling for an end to the killing of thousands of people in Gaza.

"Specifically, our encampment is protesting MIT's direct research ties to the Israeli Ministry of Defense," he said.

Protesters also sat in the middle of Massachusetts Avenue, blocking the street temporarily during rush hour in the Boston area. By evening the atmosphere around the MIT protest grew less tense with protesters listening to speeches and joining chants before taking a pizza dinner break.

Police in large part had pulled back from the encampment after offering a more robust presence earlier in the day. An MIT spokesperson said the fencing was breached after the arrival of demonstrators from outside the university and that no arrests had been made by Monday night.

The demonstrations at Columbia have roiled its campus and officials said Monday that while it won't hold its main ceremony, students will be able to celebrate at a series of smaller, school-based ceremonies this week and next.

The decision comes as universities around the country wrangle with how to handle commencements for students whose high school graduations were derailed by COVID-19 in 2020. Another campus shaken by protests, Emory University, announced Monday that it would move its commencement from its Atlanta campus to a suburban arena. Others, including the University of Michigan, Indiana University and Northeastern, have pulled off ceremonies with few disruptions.

Columbia's decision to cancel its main ceremonies scheduled for May 15 saves its president, Minouche Shafik, from having to deliver a commencement address in the same part of campus where police dismantled a protest encampment last week. The Ivy League school in upper Manhattan said it made the decision after discussions with students.

"Our students emphasized that these smaller-scale, school-based celebrations are most meaningful to

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them and their families," officials said.

Most of the ceremonies that had been scheduled for the south lawn of the main campus, where encampments were taken down last week, will take place about 5 miles (8 kilometers) north at Columbia's sports complex, officials said.

Speakers at some of Columbia's still-scheduled graduation ceremonies include Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright James Ijames and Dr. Monica Bertagnoli, director of the National Institutes of Health.

Columbia had already canceled in-person classes. More than 200 pro-Palestinian demonstrators who had camped out on Columbia's green or occupied an academic building were arrested in recent weeks.

Similar encampments sprouted up elsewhere as universities struggled with where to draw the line between allowing free expression while maintaining safe and inclusive campuses.

The University of Southern California earlier canceled its main graduation ceremony. Students abandoned their camp at USC on Sunday after being surrounded by police and threatened with arrest.

Other universities have held graduation ceremonies with beefed-up security. The University of Michigan's ceremony was interrupted by chanting a few times Saturday. In Boston on Sunday, some students waved small Palestinian or Israeli flags at Northeastern University's commencement in Fenway Park.

Emory's ceremonies scheduled for May 13 will be held at the GasSouth Arena and Convocation Center in Duluth, almost 20 miles (30 kilometers) northeast of the university's Atlanta campus, President Gregory Fennes said in an open letter.

"Please know that this decision was not taken lightly," Fennes wrote. "It was made in close consultation with the Emory Police Department, security advisors and other agencies — each of which advised against holding commencement events on our campuses."

The 16,000-student university is one of many that has seen repeated protests stemming from the conflict that started Oct. 7 when Hamas militants attacked southern Israel, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking roughly 250 hostages. Student protesters are calling on their schools to divest from companies that do business with Israel or otherwise contribute to the war effort.

Vowing to destroy Hamas, Israel launched an offensive in Gaza that has killed more than 34,500 Palestinians, about two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. Israeli strikes have devastated the enclave and displaced most of its inhabitants.

Hamas on Monday announced its acceptance of an Egyptian-Qatari cease-fire proposal, but Israel said the deal did not meet its "core demands" and that it was pushing ahead with an assault on the southern Gaza town of Rafah.

"Cease-fires are temporary," said Selina Al-Shihabi, a Georgetown University sophomore who was taking part in a protest at George Washington. "There can be a cease-fire, but the U.S. government will continue to arm the Israeli military. We plan to be here until the university divests or until they drag us out of here."

At the University of California, San Diego, police cleared an encampment and arrested more than 64 people, including 40 students.

The University of California, Los Angeles, moved all classes online for the entire week due to ongoing disruptions following the dismantling of an encampment last week. The university police force reported 44 arrests.

Chancellor Gene Block said Monday night that UCLA's newly appointed chief safety officer would lead an investigation to identify and prosecute the "group of instigators" who led a violent attack on pro-Palestinian demonstrators on April 30. The university has asked Los Angeles police, the FBI and the district attorney's office for assistance, Block said.

Schools are trying various tactics from appeasement to threats of disciplinary action to get protesters to take down encampments or move to campus areas where demonstrations would be less intrusive.

At the Rhode Island School of Design, where students have taken over a building, a spokesperson said Monday that the school affirms students' rights to freedom of expression, freedom of speech and peaceful assembly and that they support all members of their community. The RISD president and provost were on site meeting with the demonstrators on Monday, the spokesperson said.

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago said in a Facebook post Sunday that it offered protesters

"amnesty from academic sanction and trespassing charges" if they moved.

"Many protesters left the premises of their own accord after being notified by the police that they were trespassing and subject to arrest," the school said. "Those that remained were arrested after multiple warnings to leave, including some of whom we recognized as SAIC students."

A group of faculty and staff members at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill asked the administration for amnesty for any students who were arrested and suspended during recent protests. UNC Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine said in a media advisory that it would deliver a letter on behalf of more than 500 faculty who support the student activists.

Other universities took a different approach.

Harvard University's interim president, Alan Garber, warned students that those participating in a pro-Palestinian encampment in Harvard Yard could face "involuntary leave." That means they would not be allowed on campus, could lose their student housing and may not be able to take exams, Garber said.

Hamas accepts Gaza cease-fire; Israel says it will continue talks but presses on with Rafah attacks

By SAM MEDNICK, JOSEF FEDERMAN and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Hamas said Monday it accepted an Egyptian-Qatari cease-fire proposal, but Israel said the deal did not meet its core demands and it was pushing ahead with an assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah. Still, Israel said it would continue negotiations.

The high-stakes diplomatic moves and military brinkmanship left a glimmer of hope alive — but only barely — for an accord that could bring at least a pause in the 7-month-old war that has devastated the Gaza Strip. Hanging over the wrangling was the threat of an all-out Israeli assault on Rafah, a move the United States strongly opposes and that aid groups warn will be disastrous for some 1.4 million Palestinians taking refuge there.

Hamas's abrupt acceptance of the cease-fire deal came hours after Israel ordered an evacuation of some 100,000 Palestinians from eastern neighborhoods of Rafah, signaling an invasion was imminent.

The Israeli military said it was conducting "targeted strikes" against Hamas in eastern Rafah. Soon after, Israeli tanks entered Rafah, reaching as close as 200 meters (yards) from Rafah's crossing with neighboring Egypt, a Palestinian security official and an Egyptian official said. Both spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media. The reported incursion came a day after Hamas militants killed four Israeli soldiers in a mortar attack that Israel said originated near the Rafah crossing.

The Egyptian official said the operation appeared to be limited. The Associated Press could not independently verify the scope of the operation.

Israeli airstrikes also hit elsewhere in Rafah late Monday, killing at least five people, including a child and a woman, hospital officials said.

The Israeli military declined to comment.

Shortly after Hamas said it had accepted the Egyptian-Qatari truce proposal, Israel's War Cabinet decided to continue the Rafah operation, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said. It also said that while the proposal Hamas agreed to "is far from meeting Israel's core demands," it would send negotiators to Egypt to work on a deal. Late Monday, Qatar announced it was sending a team to Egypt as well.

President Joe Biden spoke with Netanyahu and reiterated U.S. concerns about an invasion of Rafah. U.S. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said American officials were reviewing the Hamas response "and discussing it with our partners in the region."

It was not immediately known if the proposal Hamas agreed to was substantially different from one that U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken pressed the militant group to accept last week, which Blinken said included significant Israeli concessions.

An American official said the U.S. was examining whether what Hamas agreed to was the version signed off on by Israel and international negotiators or something else.

Egyptian officials said that proposal called for a cease-fire of multiple stages starting with a limited hostage

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release and partial Israeli troop pullbacks within Gaza. The two sides would also negotiate a "permanent calm" that would lead to a full hostage release and greater Israeli withdrawal out of the territory, they said.

Hamas sought clearer guarantees for its key demand of an end to the war and complete Israeli withdrawal in return for the release of all hostages, but it wasn't clear if any changes were made.

Israeli leaders have repeatedly rejected that trade-off, vowing to keep up their campaign until Hamas is destroyed after its Oct. 7 attack on Israel that triggered the war.

Netanyahu is under pressure from hard-line partners in his coalition who demand an attack on Rafah and could collapse his government if he signs a deal. But he also faces pressure from the families of hostages to reach a deal for their release. They say that time is running out to bring their loved ones home safely, and a ground operation would further endanger them.

Thousands of Israelis rallied around the country Monday night calling for an immediate agreement. About 1,000 protesters swelled near the defense headquarters in Tel Aviv. In Jerusalem, about 100 protesters marched toward Netanyahu's residence with a banner reading, "The blood is on your hands."

Israel says Rafah is the last significant Hamas stronghold in Gaza, and Netanyahu said Monday that the offensive against the city was vital to ensuring the militants can't rebuild their military capabilities.

But he faces strong American opposition. Miller said Monday the U.S. has not seen a credible plan to protect Palestinian civilians. "We cannot support an operation in Rafah as it is currently envisioned," he said.

The looming operation has raised global alarm. Aid agencies have warned that an offensive will bring a surge of more civilian deaths in an Israeli campaign that has already killed over 34,000 people and devastated the territory. It could also wreck the humanitarian aid operation based out of Rafah that is keeping Palestinians across the Gaza Strip alive, they say.

Israeli leaflets, text messages and radio broadcasts ordered Palestinians to evacuate eastern neighborhoods of Rafah, warning that an attack was imminent and anyone who stays "puts themselves and their family members in danger."

The military told people to move to an Israel-declared humanitarian zone called Muwasi, a makeshift camp on the coast. It said Israel has expanded the size of the zone and that it included tents, food, water and field hospitals.

It wasn't immediately clear, however, if that was already in place.

Around 450,000 displaced Palestinians already are sheltering in Muwasi. The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, said it has been providing them with aid. But conditions are squalid, with few sanitation facilities in the largely rural area, forcing families to dig private latrines.

The evacuation order left Palestinians in Rafah wrestling with having to uproot their families once again for an unknown fate, exhausted after months living in sprawling tent camps or crammed into schools or other shelters in and around the city. Israeli airstrikes on Rafah early Monday killed 22 people, including children and two infants.

Mohammed Jindiyah said that at the beginning of the war, he tried to hold out in his home in northern Gaza under heavy bombardment before fleeing to Rafah.

He is complying with Israel's evacuation order this time, but was unsure whether to move to Muwasi or elsewhere.

"We are 12 families, and we don't know where to go. There is no safe area in Gaza," he said.

Sahar Abu Nahel, who fled to Rafah with 20 family members, including her children and grandchildren, wiped tears from her cheeks, despairing at a new move.

"I have no money or anything. I am seriously tired, as are the children," she said. "Maybe it's more honorable for us to die. We are being humiliated."

The war was sparked by the unprecedented Oct. 7 raid into southern Israel in which Palestinian militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted some 250 hostages. After exchanges during a November cease-fire, Hamas is believed to still hold about 100 hostages as well the bodies of around 30 others.

For a Louisiana lawmaker, exempting incest and rape from the state's abortion ban is personal

By SARA CLINE Associated Press

For Louisiana Rep. Delisha Boyd, the uphill battle she faces to exempt pregnancies that are the result of rape and incest from Louisiana's strict abortion ban is not just morally right — it's also personal.

With a GOP-dominated legislative committee set to debate and vote on Boyd's exemption bill Tuesday, the Democratic New Orleans lawmaker has decided to publicly share her own story to underscore the importance of letting rape and incest survivors decide their own fates. If the bill advances, it will still have to make it through both Republican-led chambers of the Legislature.

Boyd says her mother, the victim of statutory rape by a man nearly twice her age, was only 15 when Boyd was conceived. Boyd was born in 1969, four years before abortion became legal under the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark *Roe v. Wade* ruling.

More than five decades later, rape and incest survivors in Louisiana who become pregnant find themselves in a similar situation: forced to carry the baby to term in a state that has one of the country's highest maternal mortality rates, or to travel to another state where abortion is still legal.

Supporters of Louisiana's ban note that if Boyd's mother had been given the choice to abort, the lawmaker might not exist.

"Aren't you glad to be here?" GOP state Rep. Tony Bacala asked her, according to a report in *The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate*.

Boyd says it's not that she regrets having been born; she just thinks her mother died before her time because of it. Boyd said her mother turned to drugs — something that Boyd attributes in large part to the trauma of giving birth and then raising a child as a teen — and as a result, died before she was 30.

"It was a life for a life," Boyd told *The Associated Press* in an interview after a brief but emotional hearing held at the Legislature last week. "You're then telling me to consider her life less important than my life."

Boyd added that her story is likely an "exception to the rule" — other children of teen mothers can end up in foster care or turn to drugs or crime, she said. She said just because she turned out OK, it does not give her "the right to tell you what to do in your family."

Since authoring the bill, Boyd says, she has been told stories similar to hers: that of a Louisiana girl who was raped and gave birth at 13 years old, and a 9-year-old girl who became pregnant after being sexually assaulted.

As in multiple other Republican states, Louisiana's abortion law went into effect in 2022 following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, ending a half-century of the nationwide right to abortion. The only exceptions to the ban are if there is substantial risk of death or impairment to the mother if she continues the pregnancy or in the case of "medically futile" pregnancies — when the fetus has a fatal abnormality.

In 2021, there were 7,444 reported abortions in Louisiana, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Of those, 27 were obtained by people younger than 15. Nationwide, 1,338 pregnant patients under 15 received abortions, according to the CDC.

A study released by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that between July 2022 and January 2024, there were more than 64,000 pregnancies resulting from rape in states where abortion has been banned in all or most cases.

The legislative committee will review Boyd's bill on Tuesday. A nearly identical measure effectively died in the same committee last year. Committee members delayed the hearing they began last week to give Boyd time to make adjustments.

Boyd said she plans to amend her proposal so that rape and incest exceptions would only apply to those 17 and younger. She's hoping the change will help the measure advance to a debate before the full House.

Of the 14 states with abortion bans at all stages of pregnancy, six have exceptions in cases of rape and five have exceptions for incest. But Boyd faces an uphill battle in Louisiana, a reliably red state firmly ensconced in the Bible Belt, where even some Democrats oppose abortions.

She is hoping that sharing her mother's story will bring to light the realities that pregnant rape and incest survivors face — and, even possibly, change the minds of some opposing lawmakers.

"No one took care of her, no one thought to even consider what was going on with her emotionally, psychologically, probably even spiritually. ... I was just conceived and left for her to raise," Boyd said.

Floodwaters start receding around Houston area as recovery begins following rescues and evacuations

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Floodwaters in the Houston area and parts of Southeast Texas began to recede on Monday, allowing residents to begin returning to their homes and assess damages after days of heavy rainfall that pummeled the area and led to hundreds of rescues — including people who were stranded on rooftops.

While officials in Harris County, where Houston is located, reported no deaths or major injuries from the flooding, Gov. Greg Abbott said there were at least three deaths in the state. Among those killed was a 4-year-old boy in North Texas who died after riding in a car that was swept away in fast waters.

After days of heavy rainfall in the Houston area and other parts of Southeast Texas, Monday's weather was dominated by mostly sunny skies and little if any rain.

"We can absolutely see the light at the end of the tunnel, and we've made it through the worst of this weather event," Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo, the county's top elected official, told reporters Monday.

Areas near Lake Livingston, located northeast of Houston, received upwards of 23 inches (58 centimeters) of rain over the past week, National Weather Service meteorologist Jimmy Fowler said. Areas in north-eastern Harris County, the nation's third-largest county, had a range of between 6 inches (15 centimeters) to almost 17 inches (43 centimeters) of rain in that same period.

Hidalgo said 233 people and 186 pets had been rescued in Harris County over the last few days. Active rescues stopped Monday, and officials were transitioning from a response phase into recovery mode and cleanup, she said.

Across Texas, more than 600 people were rescued by local and state authorities, Abbott said. A disaster declaration was issued by Abbott for 91 counties impacted by the severe weather.

"It has been heart wrenching to see our fellow Texans be literally inundated with record water fall," Abbott said.

While many of the impacted neighborhoods and subdivisions along the San Jacinto River in Harris County were accessible on Monday, others remained cut off by flooded roadways.

"We're a resilient community. I know we'll continue to recover from this," said Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez.

At least five school districts around the Houston area were closed on Monday due to the flooding.

Houston is one of the most flood-prone metro areas in the country. Hurricane Harvey in 2017 dumped historic rainfall that flooded thousands of homes and resulted in more than 60,000 rescues.

Most of the city of Houston was not heavily impacted by last week's rainfall, except for the neighborhood of Kingwood, where some homes and roads flooded.

Abbott said preliminary reports showed at least 800 structures in the state had been damaged. But he expected that number to increase as officials in many impacted communities had not yet begun to assess the destruction.

Various counties and communities north and east of the Houston area on Monday were also transitioning from rescue to recovery.

"I don't think this is going to be a short term recovery, that's for sure. It's going to be a very long term recovery," said Polk County Judge Sydney Murphy.

At least 174 water rescues were done in Polk County, where many areas still remained underwater on Monday, Murphy said.

In Walker County, water rescues had stopped, but swift-water rescue teams were checking on residents

in about 100 homes who had decided not to evacuate but now couldn't leave because of high water, said Sherri Pegoda, the county's deputy emergency management coordinator. The rescue teams were taking food and water to these residents, she said.

"Another week or maybe two before the waters recede enough for them to get out on their own," Pegoda said.

As he rode a boat through a rural flooded neighborhood in Trinity County on Sunday, Sheriff Woody Wallace said during a Facebook livestream that the residents in his county had "suffered much."

During the livestream, partially submerged cars and street signs could be seen around Wallace. At one point, a game warden on the boat rescued an armadillo that had been swimming in the flood waters.

"Poor little thing out here about to drown," Wallace said, adding they would take the armadillo, which he named Sam, to shore.

In Johnson County, south of Fort Worth, a 4-year-old boy died when he was swept away after the vehicle he was riding in became stuck in swift-moving water near the community of Lillian just before 2 a.m. Sunday, an official said. The Tarrant County medical examiner's office said the cause of death of the child, who would have turned 5 later this month, was drowning.

Abbott said two other deaths tied to the severe weather were a man in Bosque County who was swept away by rushing waters and a Conroe Police Department officer who died after being injured when a tornado struck his home in Trinity County on April 28.

Murphy said she is tired of dealing with historic weather events, but "whatever happens, whatever Mother Nature sends our way, then we will deal with."

The FAA investigates after Boeing says workers in South Carolina falsified 787 inspection records

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — The Federal Aviation Administration said Monday it has opened an investigation into Boeing after the beleaguered company reported that workers at a South Carolina plant falsified inspection records on certain 787 planes. Boeing said its engineers have determined that misconduct did not create "an immediate safety of flight issue."

In an email to Boeing's South Carolina employees on April 29, Scott Stocker, who leads the 787 program, said a worker observed an "irregularity" in a required test of the wing-to-body join and reported it to his manager.

"After receiving the report, we quickly reviewed the matter and learned that several people had been violating Company policies by not performing a required test, but recording the work as having been completed," Stocker wrote.

Boeing notified the FAA and is taking "swift and serious corrective action with multiple teammates," Stocker said.

No planes have been taken out of service, but having to perform the test out of order on planes will slow the delivery of jets still being built at the final assembly plant in North Charleston, South Carolina.

Boeing must also create a plan to address planes that are already flying, the FAA said.

The 787 is a two-aisle plane that debuted in 2011 and is used mostly for long international flights.

"The company voluntarily informed us in April that it may not have completed required inspections to confirm adequate bonding and grounding where the wings join the fuselage on certain 787 Dreamliner airplanes," the agency said in a written statement. "The FAA is investigating whether Boeing completed the inspections and whether company employees may have falsified aircraft records."

The company has been under intense pressure since a door plug blew out of a Boeing 737 Max during an Alaska Airlines flight in January, leaving a gaping hole in the plane. The accident halted progress that Boeing seemed to be making while recovering from two deadly crashes of Max jets in 2018 and 2019.

Those crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia, which killed 346 people, are back in the spotlight, too. The families of some of the victims have pushed the Justice Department to revive a criminal fraud charge

against the company by determining that Boeing's continued lapses violated the terms of a 2021 deferred prosecution agreement.

In April, a Boeing whistleblower, Sam Salehpour, testified at a congressional hearing that the company had taken manufacturing shortcuts to turn out 787s as quickly as possible; his allegations were not directly related to those the company disclosed to the FAA last month. The company rejected Salehpour's claims.

In his email, Stocker praised the worker who came forward to report what he saw: "I wanted to personally thank and commend that teammate for doing the right thing. It's critical that every one of us speak up when we see something that may not look right, or that needs attention."

Paying college athletes appears closer than ever. How could it work and what stands in the way?

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Sports Writer

A settlement being discussed in an antitrust lawsuit against the NCAA and major college conferences could cost billions and pave the way for a compensation model for college athletes.

An agreement has not been finalized and many questions remain unanswered. It is also unclear if new rules could withstand further legal scrutiny, but it appears college sports is heading down a revolutionary path with at least some schools directly paying athletes to participate. Here's what is known and what still needs to be figured out:

THE CASE

House vs. NCAA is a class-action federal lawsuit seeking damages for athletes who were denied the opportunity, going back to 2016, to earn money from use of their name, image or likeness — often referred to by the acronym NIL. The plaintiffs, including former Arizona State swimmer Grant House, are also asking the court to rule that NIL compensation should include billions of dollars in media rights fees that go to the NCAA and the wealthiest conferences (Big Ten, Big 12, Atlantic Coast and Southeastern), mostly for football and basketball.

HOW MUCH?

The settlement being discussed could have the NCAA paying nearly \$3 billion in damages over 10 years, with help from insurance and withholding of distributions that would have gone to the four big conferences. Last year, NCAA revenue approached \$1.3 billion and the association projects a steady rise in coming years, thanks mostly to increases baked into the television contract with CBS and Warner Bros. Discovery for the men's basketball tournament. A new, eight-year deal with ESPN worth \$920 million for the Division I women's basketball tournament and other championship events takes effect in 2025.

The potential settlement also calls for a \$300 million commitment from each school in those four conferences over 10 years, including about \$20 million per year directed toward paying athletes. Administrators have warned that could lead to program cuts for the so-called non-revenue sports familiar to fans who watch the Olympics.

"It's the Olympic sports that would be in jeopardy," Alabama athletic director Greg Byrne said during a March panel in Washington led by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas). "That's men and women. If you look at the numbers for us at the University of Alabama, with our 19 sports outside of football and men's basketball, we lost collectively almost \$40 million."

WHO GETS PAID?

Not entirely clear. Presumably, it would start with the athletes in sports that produce most of the revenue: football and men's basketball players at the biggest and wealthiest programs. Women's basketball is likely next in line, but it is possible athletes in all sports could see some benefit — but probably not at all schools.

What's being considered is allowing schools to pay athletes, but not requiring those payments. Schools that don't rake in millions in TV revenue wouldn't necessarily be on the hook. There are also unanswered questions about whether the federal gender equity law Title IX would require equal funding for male and female athletes.

WHO MAKES THE CALL?

Getting the presidential boards of four conferences and the NCAA board of governors to approve a settlement is not a given, not to mention the plaintiffs in the House case. Still, the possibility of having to pay \$4 billion in damages — and the NCAA has been on the losing end of many recent court cases — has spurred interest in a deal before trial begins in January.

The case is being heard in the Northern District of California by U.S. Judge Claudia Wilken, who has already ruled against the NCAA other landmark antitrust lawsuits and ordered the sides in House to seek a settlement.

EMPLOYMENT AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Settling existing cases is only one step. A new system for compensating college athletes would be needed to avoid similar challenges in the future; for example, anything that looks like a cap on compensation by, say, the four major conferences would be ripe for another lawsuit.

The NCAA has been asking Congress for some kind of antitrust exemption for years, but the emphasis has shifted lately from regulating NIL compensation to keeping the athletes from being deemed employees.

A ruling from an NLRB regional director paved the way for members of the Dartmouth men's basketball team to vote to join a union after being deemed employees, and many have advocated for collective bargaining as a solution to college sports' antitrust exposure.

Jason Stahl, executive director of the College Football Players Association advocacy group, says lawmakers should create a special status for college athletes that would give them the right to organize and collectively bargain without actual employee status.

Stahl said even though many college athletes are apprehensive about being employees and joining a union, they should have the right to decide that.

"My concern is there would be some type of one-two punch," Stahl said of a lawsuit settlement followed quickly by federal legislation to codify a revenue-sharing plan that precludes athletes from employee status and the right to organize. "A lot of things I'm hearing about this cap are not things I want to be hearing."

WHAT'S NEXT

There are so many moving parts that it is hard to say with certainty, though settling House seems to a priority for late spring or summer. The earliest for any true changes noticed on campus would be fall of 2025.

Trump fined \$1,000 for gag order violation in hush money case as ex-employee recounts reimbursements

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, ERIC TUCKER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — The judge in Donald Trump's hush money trial fined him \$1,000 on Monday and, in his sternest warning yet, told the former president that future gag order violations could send him to jail. The reprimand opened a revelatory day of testimony, as jurors for the first time heard the details of the financial transactions at the center of the case and saw payment checks bearing Trump's signature.

The testimony from former Trump Organization controller Jeffrey McConney provided a mechanical but vital recitation of how the company reimbursed payments that were allegedly meant to suppress embarrassing stories from surfacing during Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and then logged them as legal expenses in a manner that Manhattan prosecutors say broke the law.

McConney's appearance on the witness stand came as the first criminal trial of a former U.S. president entered its third week of testimony. His account lacked the human drama offered Friday by longtime Trump aide Hope Hicks, but it nonetheless yielded an important building block for prosecutors trying to pull back the curtain on what they say was a corporate records cover-up of transactions designed to protect Trump's presidential bid during a pivotal stretch of the race.

At the center of the testimony was a \$130,000 payment Trump's then-lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen made to porn actor Stormy Daniels in October 2016 to stifle her claims of an extramarital sexual encounter

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with Trump a decade earlier.

The 34 felony counts of falsifying business records accuse Trump of labeling the money paid to Cohen in his company's records as legal fees. Prosecutors contend that by paying him income and giving him extra to account for taxes in monthly installments for a year, the Trump executives were able to conceal the reimbursement.

McConney and another witness testified that all but two of the monthly checks were drawn from Trump's personal account. Yet even as jurors saw the checks and other documentary evidence, prosecutors did not elicit testimony Monday showing that Trump himself dictated that the payments would be logged as legal expenses — a designation that prosecutors contend was intentionally deceptive.

McConney acknowledged during cross-examination that Trump never asked him to log the reimbursements as legal expenses and never discussed the matter with him at all. Another witness, Deborah Tarasoff, a Trump Organization accounts payable supervisor, said under questioning that she did not get permission to cut the checks in question from Trump himself.

"You never had any reason to believe that President Trump was hiding anything or anything like that?" Trump attorney Todd Blanche asked.

"Correct," Tarasoff replied.

The testimony followed Judge Juan M. Merchan's sober warning to Trump that additional violations of a gag order barring inflammatory out-of-court comments about witnesses, jurors and others closely connected to the case could land the former president behind bars.

The \$1,000 fine imposed Monday marks the second time since the trial began last month that Trump has been sanctioned for violating the gag order. He was fined \$9,000 last week — \$1,000 for each of nine violations.

"It appears that the \$1,000 fines are not serving as a deterrent. Therefore going forward, this court will have to consider a jail sanction," Merchan said before jurors were brought into the courtroom. Trump's statements, the judge added, "threaten to interfere with the fair administration of justice and constitute a direct attack on the rule of law. I cannot allow that to continue."

Trump sat forward in his seat, glowering at the judge as he handed down the ruling. When the judge finished speaking, Trump shook his head twice and crossed his arms.

Yet even as Merchan warned of jail time in his most pointed and direct admonition, he also made clear his reservations about a step that he described as a "last resort" and said he would only do so if prosecutors recommended it.

"The last thing I want to do is put you in jail," Merchan said. "You are the former president of the United States and possibly the next president, as well. There are many reasons why incarceration is truly a last resort for me. To take that step would be disruptive to these proceedings, which I imagine you want to end as quickly as possible."

The latest violation stems from an April 22 interview with television channel Real America's Voice in which Trump criticized the speed at which the jury was picked and claimed, without evidence, that it was stacked with Democrats.

Once testimony resumed, McConney recounted conversations with longtime Trump Organization finance chief Allen Weisselberg in January 2017 about reimbursing Cohen for a \$130,000 payment intended to buy Daniels' silence over her account of a sexual encounter at a 2006 celebrity golf outing in Lake Tahoe, California.

Weisselberg "said we had to get some money to Michael, we had to reimburse Michael. He tossed a pad toward me, and I started taking notes on what he said," McConney testified. "That's how I found out about it."

"He kind of threw the pad at me and said, 'Take this down,'" said McConney, who worked for Trump's company for about 36 years, retiring last year after he was granted immunity to testify for the prosecution at the Trump Organization's New York criminal tax fraud trial.

A bank statement displayed in court showed Cohen paying \$130,000 to Keith Davidson, Daniels' lawyer, on Oct. 27, 2016, out of an account for an entity Cohen created for the purpose.

Weisselberg's handwritten notes spell out a plan to pay Cohen \$420,000, which included a base reimbursement that was then doubled to reflect anticipated taxes as well as a \$60,000 bonus and an expense that prosecutors have described as a technology contract.

McConney's own notes, taken on the notepad he said Weisselberg threw at him, were also shown in court. After calculations that laid out that Cohen would get \$35,000 a month for 12 months, McConney wrote: "wire monthly from DJT."

Asked what that meant, McConney said: "That was out of the president's personal bank account."

McConney testified that he had instructed Tarasoff to record the reimbursements to Cohen as a legal expense, reasoning that "we were paying a lawyer so I said to post it to legal expenses in the general ledger."

McConney suggested it was his idea alone to log the payments that way, acknowledging under cross-examination that Trump never directed him to log Cohen's payments as legal expenses, nor did Weisselberg relay to him that Trump wanted them logged that way.

"Allen never told me that," McConney testified. In fact, McConney said he never spoke to Trump about the reimbursement issue at all. Regardless, Trump lawyer Emil Bove suggested, the "legal expense" label made sense — and was not duplicitous — because Cohen was a lawyer at the time.

"OK," McConney responded, prompting laughter throughout the courtroom. "Sure. Yes."

After paying the first two checks to Cohen through a trust, the remainder of the checks, beginning in April 2017, were paid from Trump's personal account, McConney testified.

With Trump, the only signatory to that account, now in the White House, the change in funding source necessitated "a whole new process for us," McConney added.

Tarasoff, the other witness who testified Monday, said that once Trump became president, checks written from his personal account had to first be delivered, via FedEx, "to the White House for him to sign."

The checks would then return with Trump's Sharpie signature. "I'd pull them apart, mail out the check and file the backup," she said, meaning putting the invoice into the Trump Organization's filing system.

Prosecutors are continuing to build toward their star witness, Cohen, who pleaded guilty to federal charges related to the hush money payments, went to prison and has been disbarred. He is expected to undergo a bruising cross-examination from defense lawyers seeking to undermine his credibility with jurors.

Lawsuit alleges decades of child sex abuse at Illinois juvenile detention centers statewide

By SOPHIA TAREEN Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Child sexual abuse at Illinois juvenile detention centers was pervasive and systemic for decades, according to disturbing accounts in a lawsuit filed Monday by 95 men and women housed at the youth centers as children.

The lawsuit details alleged incidents of abuse from 1996 to 2017, including gang rape, forced oral sex, beatings and groping of children by corrections officers, sergeants, nurses, therapists, a chaplain and others at nine youth centers. Many plaintiffs said they were threatened or rewarded to keep quiet.

"The State of Illinois has allowed a culture of abuse at Illinois Youth Centers to flourish unabated," the 186-page complaint said.

The lawsuit, filed in the Illinois Court of Claims, follows similar harrowing allegations of child sex abuse at juvenile detention centers in Maryland, New Jersey, New Hampshire, California and New York City. Some cases have gone to trial or resulted in settlements; arrests have been infrequent.

The Illinois lawsuit contends the state failed to supervise, discipline, remove or investigate alleged abusers, enabling the abuse to continue. The complaint alleges the abuse happened at youth centers in locations all over the state including Chicago, Joliet, Harrisburg, Murphysboro and Warrenville. Several locations have since closed.

The lawsuit names the state of Illinois, the state's Department of Corrections and Department of Juvenile

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Justice as defendants. It seeks damages of roughly \$2 million per plaintiff, the most allowed under law. In an emailed statement, the Department of Juvenile Justice said the alleged incidents took place under former department leaders but that the current administration takes youth safety seriously and that "all allegations of staff misconduct are immediately and thoroughly investigated" with other agencies, including state police.

Spokespersons for Gov. J.B. Pritzker and the Department of Corrections referred reporters to the Department of Juvenile Justice's statement.

At an unrelated news conference Monday, Pritzker, who first took office in 2019, told reporters "it was a matter that involved a prior administration." He said leadership of the Department of Juvenile Justice over the past five years "has been excellent" but declined to say more, citing pending litigation.

The 95 plaintiffs are among hundreds of victims of sexual abuse at Illinois detention centers, said Jerome H. Block, an attorney who brought the case and who expects to file more lawsuits. His firm has helped bring lawsuits in Maryland, New Jersey and New York City.

"The very people that were entrusted with keeping our clients safe when they were children were the ones perpetrating the sexual abuse," Block said. "This is long-term institutionalized sexual abuse."

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they were sexually assaulted unless they consent to being identified or decide to tell their stories publicly.

Three of the 95 plaintiffs are named in the lawsuit, including Jeffery Christian of Maywood, who said it was important to come forward publicly because he thought it could help others who may be suffering in silence.

The 36-year-old suburban Chicago man said he was sexually abused at two different detention centers beginning when he was about 13, including by a counselor who groped and fondled him during counseling sessions.

Like many of the plaintiffs, Christian said the abuse was reported at the time, but facility administrators did nothing to address it. He said reporting the abuse made him more of a target. After the incidents, he became withdrawn and anti-social.

"It prepared me to start looking at the world different," he said. "It took some light out of me."

At least six detention center workers — including a current mayor of a small southern Illinois community — were identified in the lawsuit as alleged repeat offenders with separate accusations from different plaintiffs. Some alleged offenders are named in the lawsuit, while others are identified only as the plaintiffs remembered them by physical attributes, initials or nicknames. Most plaintiffs are identified by initials in the complaint.

Among other things, the complaint blames the state's use of unconstitutional and systemic strip searches as perpetrating sexual abuse.

"The State of Illinois has had notice of such abuse for decades and nonetheless neglected to protect its confined youth from sexual abuse and failed to implement policies necessary to ensure such protection," the complaint said.

The lawsuit cites a 2013 U.S. Department of Justice survey of incarcerated youth that found Illinois was among the four worst states nationwide for sexual abuse in detention facilities. It also notes about half a dozen criminal cases from 2000 to 2021 where youth center employees were convicted of sexually abusing children and alleges that abuse continues to this day.

The alleged repeat offenders include Rocky James, a longtime supervisor at the Harrisburg center who currently serves as the mayor of nearby Eldorado in southern Illinois, according to the lawsuit. Six plaintiffs separately allege that James abused them in the 2000s, including one teenager who was "regularly and physically coerced" to have sexual intercourse inside his cell and the bathroom, it said.

James, a former Eldorado city council member and Saline County board member, has served as mayor of the town of about 3,500 people since 2007. He has not been charged with wrongdoing.

When reached Monday by telephone, James, 59, said it was the first he was hearing of the allegations. "There's absolutely no truth to it," he said, declining further comment.

Criminal charges are not beyond the realm of possibility in some of the more recent cases. Although

there's no longer a statute of limitations on crimes related to the sexual abuse of minors occurring after Jan. 1, 2020, a 20-year limit remains on alleged offenses committed prior to that, allowing for the possibility of criminal charges in cases allegedly occurring as long ago as 2004.

Many plaintiffs said their abusers threatened them with violence, solitary confinement, transfers to harsher facilities and longer sentences if they reported the abuse. Others were given extra food, money in their commissary accounts, the chance to play video games and other rewards if they kept silent.

The plaintiffs ranged in age from 12 to 17 at the time they said they were abused, often while they were isolated in a bathroom, kitchens or in their cells. When detainees reported abuse, the lawsuit said it was laughed off, with one lieutenant saying, "He's just playing around," or a chaplain who told a 17-year-old boy he allegedly fondled and was upset, "This is what goes on" in the church.

They are now adults, with the oldest in their early 40s. Most are men, but one of the detention centers was co-ed. They are from small communities and big cities, mostly in Illinois. Several are from Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio, Iowa and Texas.

"Children, that are detained in juvenile detention centers, are especially vulnerable to sexual abuse. That's because the staff working at these juvenile detention centers have complete and total control over these children," Block said. "There is no way for these children to escape the abuse."

American soldier was arrested in Russia and accused of stealing from a girlfriend, US officials say

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An American soldier visiting a girlfriend in Russia's port city of Vladivostok was arrested on charges of stealing from her and remains in custody, according to several U.S. officials.

U.S. officials said Monday the soldier, Staff Sgt. Gordon Black, 34, was stationed in South Korea and was in the process of returning home to Fort Cavazos in Texas. Instead, officials said that Black, who is married, traveled to Russia to see a longtime girlfriend. His arrest only further complicates U.S. relations with Russia, which have grown increasingly tense as the war in Ukraine drags on.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel details.

Cynthia Smith, Army spokeswoman, confirmed that a soldier was detained on Thursday in Vladivostok, a major military and commercial Pacific port, on charges of criminal misconduct. She said Russia notified the U.S. and the Army told the soldier's family.

"The U.S. Department of State is providing appropriate consular support to the soldier in Russia," Smith said.

According to officials, the Russian woman had lived in South Korea, and last fall she and Black got into some type of domestic dispute or altercation. After that, she left South Korea. It isn't clear if she was forced to leave or what, if any, role Korean authorities had in the matter.

Officials also said that Black, an infantry soldier, did not tell his unit that he was going to Russia, and did not receive any authorization to go there. They said he was essentially on leave, as he left Korea to redeploy back home to Fort Cavazos.

It's unclear, however, if U.S. service members are specifically prohibited from traveling to Russia, although the State Department strongly advises U.S. citizens not to go.

The arrest comes less than a year after American soldier Travis King sprinted into North Korea across the heavily fortified border between the Koreas. North Korea later announced that it would expel King, who was returned to the U.S. He was eventually charged with desertion.

Russia is known to be holding a number of Americans in its jails, including corporate security executive Paul Whelan and Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich. The U.S. government has designated both as wrongfully detained and has been trying to negotiate for their release.

Others detained include Travis Leake, a musician who had been living in Russia for years and was arrested last year on drug-related charges; Marc Fogel, a teacher in Moscow, who was sentenced to 14 years in prison, also on drug charges; and dual nationals Alsu Kurmasheva and Ksenia Khavana.

The soldier's arrest in Russia was first reported by NBC News.

Donald Trump calls Joe Biden weak on antisemitism, ignoring his own rhetoric

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump is accusing Joe Biden of offering a weak response to antisemitism, wielding the clashes on colleges campuses over the war in Gaza as a campaign issue. But Trump's attacks ignore his own long history of rhetoric that invokes the language of Nazi Germany and plays on stereotypes of Jews and politics.

The latest example came over the weekend, when Trump — accusing the White House of having a role in his multiple state and federal criminal prosecutions — told Republican donors gathered for a private retreat at his Florida resort that Biden is running a "Gestapo administration," referring to the secret police force of Nazi Germany.

Amy Spitalnick, CEO of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, called it a "deliberate tactic" to attack Biden and distract from his own track record.

"It's wholly aligned with his long history of offensive and irresponsible comments when it comes to the Jewish community, including the normalization of antisemitism," Spitalnick said.

Biden's campaign called it "despicable" and an attack on law enforcement.

Trump's attempts to claim a moral high ground against antisemitism come as the Democratic president is navigating the intense divisions of the Israel-Hamas war and the resulting unrest from demonstrations. Trump and other Republicans have seized on the disruptions on college campuses, which have at times been violent, as a sign of weakness from Biden and Democrats. It's also the latest example of Trump's timeworn tactic of repackaging a censure he's received and stamping it on his opponents.

As pro-Palestinian demonstrations have broken out at college campuses, some people have reported antisemitic chants and messages at and around the protests and some Jewish students have said they have felt unsafe on campus. Trump's campaign on Monday released a video on Yom Hashoah, Israel's Holocaust remembrance day, that aimed to contrast the 2024 presidential candidates' responses on antisemitism.

The video shows images of Trump visiting Israel and speeches he has given pledging to stand with Jewish people and confront antisemitism, while showing footage of the protests on campuses and clips of Biden responding to protesters upset with his administration's support for Israel in its war against Hamas.

One of the clips shows Biden saying, "They have a point," but does not include the next sentence in which Biden said, "We need to get a lot more care into Gaza."

Karoline Leavitt, national press secretary for Trump's campaign, criticized Biden for taking "weeks to even talk about the Biden Campus Protests" and not condemning what she described as "pro-Hamas, pro-genocide mobs," saying "the sad truth is that he needs their votes."

"Jewish Americans and Jewish leaders around the world recognize that President Trump did more for them and the State of Israel than any President in history," Leavitt also said Monday.

Trump also spoke about the protests as he arrived in court Monday for his trial in a felony hush money case. Noting Columbia University has canceled its main commencement ceremony following weeks of pro-Palestinian protests, Trump said "that shouldn't happen." He also claimed that many protesters were backed by Biden donors.

"Ok, are you listening Israel? I hope you're listening, Israel. Hope you're getting smart," Trump said.

Biden has said he condemns "the antisemitic protests" and last week, he broke days of silence and called for "order" after some schools cleared demonstrators by force, leading to clashes.

James Singer, a spokesperson for Biden's campaign, said Biden stands against antisemitism but Trump does not.

"Trump has praised neo-Nazis, dined with neo-Nazis, echoed the rhetoric of neo-Nazis, and reportedly praised the accomplishments of Adolf Hitler," Singer said in a statement. "He cannot lead us, so he seeks to divide us with the oldest of ideas — hate, anger, revenge, and retribution."

After white nationalists chanting "Jews will not replace us!" rallied in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 and clashed with anti-racism protesters, Trump drew some of his fiercest backlash as president when he said

that there " were very fine people, on both sides. "

Trump last week downplayed Charlottesville, saying the deadly rally was "nothing" compared to ongoing pro-Palestinian campus protests.

Not long after launching his third White House campaign in 2022, Trump drew widespread condemnation for having dinner at his Mar-a-Lago club with a Holocaust-denying white nationalist and the rapper Ye, formerly known as Kanye West, shortly after he made weeks of antisemitic comments.

He's drawn criticism on his third White House campaign for using language echoing that used by Adolf Hitler to argue that immigrants entering the U.S. illegally are "poisoning the blood of our country," and labeled his opponents as "vermin."

Trump has also been accused of promoting antisemitic tropes as he's suggested that Jewish people who vote for Democrats " hate Israel" and hate "their religion" are "very disloyal to Israel." Critics have said the comments evoke the drop of dual loyalty, accusing Jews of being more loyal to their religion than their country.

After Trump's reference to "Gestapo" over the weekend, Jonathan Sarna, an American Jewish history professor at Brandeis University, said there are "great dangers" in the Nazi comparisons.

"Not only it's historically incorrect, it's morally offensive," Sarna said. "The problem is looking to associate whatever you don't like with the most evil forces, ignoring all the crucial differences. At that point, we forget what the Holocaust really was."

After AP investigation, family of missing students enrolls in school

By BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS AP Education Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — Four months after The Associated Press wrote about an Atlanta family struggling to enroll in school, all of the children — in a complete turnaround — returned to class last month. The project on Monday was named a Pulitzer Prize finalist.

The youngest child, an energetic 8-year-old girl, had never attended school before. On her first day, she was greeted at her home by a half dozen children from around the apartment block, who escorted her to the bus stop, her mother said.

"I was most excited for her," said Tameka. "My other children, they know what school's like. I want that experience for her."

(Tameka is her middle name. The AP has withheld her full name because she runs the risk of jail time or losing custody since her kids haven't been in school.)

The final child, a student with Down syndrome, started school last Tuesday, Tameka said.

Thousands of students went missing from American classrooms during the pandemic and online learning. For Tameka's four children, the disruption in schooling lasted four years. Crippling poverty, onerous paperwork and her depression stood in the way of resuming their education — or starting it for the first time.

Atlanta Public Schools received \$332 million in federal recovery money to help students rebound from pandemic learning loss and return to school. But school staff had largely stopped trying to contact Tameka's family until an AP reporter started inquiring about them last year, according to communication logs shared by the district.

Tameka often lacked a working phone, but the district relied on phone messages and made only one home visit over more than three years, records show. (AP journalists visited Tameka at her home to communicate with her.)

After AP published its story about Tameka and continued making inquiries, the school contacted the state's child welfare department at least once, according to district spokesman Seth Coleman. In March, child services threatened to remove her children if they weren't in school by mid-April, Tameka said.

That same month, Tameka received a hefty check from the federal government, thanks to a refundable child tax credit, enabling her to replace a broken phone and run errands necessary to complete the complicated paperwork to register her children.

Tameka's three older children — ages 9, 13 and 14 — didn't return to in-person school when Atlanta reopened in the fall of 2021. The school district removed the children from the rolls when they missed 10

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straight days, citing a state regulation.

Months later, Tameka tried sending two of her children to school, not realizing they no longer had a place at their elementary and middle schools.

Re-enrolling them felt impossible. In addition to filing an application, Atlanta requires a minimum of eight documents to register a child for school, including a notarized affidavit.

Tameka had lost most of her family's official documents when her partner died of a heart attack in May 2020, at the height of pandemic chaos. He was carrying the family's birth certificates, Medicaid cards and Social Security cards in a backpack that was lost at the hospital.

Without his income, and unable to work because she needed to watch the young children, Tameka had little money. The family of five got by on food stamps and \$900 a month in government assistance.

When phones or their chargers broke, she couldn't afford to replace them.

So when she received a refundable tax credit of around \$6,000 in March, it was a much-needed opportunity to buy a new phone. "I was mobile again. I could use the phone to call an Uber or Lyft," said Tameka, who doesn't have a driver's license and lives far from public transit.

Around the same time, a social worker with Georgia's Division of Family and Children's Services visited Tameka. Atlanta Public Schools apparently flagged the agency after the AP story ran and a reporter continued to inquire about Tameka's family. Agency caseworkers had visited about six months earlier and urged Tameka to get the kids into school. This time they gave her a deadline — April 15. If she failed to enroll them, case workers would place her children in foster care, they told her.

The deadline helped focus Tameka, who had already considered the school year, which ends May 24, to be lost. "I wanted them to start fresh — with everyone else," she said. "But they had other ideas," she said, referring to the child welfare social workers.

After the December story about Tameka's struggle to enroll her children in school, an Atlanta Public Schools social worker visited her home in January — the first attempted in-person contact by the district in nearly three years, according to school records. When the case worker didn't find her at home, they left a flier asking her to call them, according to spokesman Seth Coleman.

After that, the district said it planned to investigate the family's residency. The practice has become more common since 2008, when the Atlanta School Board sought to prevent parents living in other parts of town from sending their children to schools located in gentrified neighborhoods.

"We're going to do a more extensive review of all the facts we have to determine if the family resides within Atlanta Public School boundaries, and if so, in which school zone," Coleman wrote in an email in April. "Our people have done EVERYTHING they can to help this parent and this family and continue to do so."

Over the course of reporting the story, the AP visited Tameka and her family at their Atlanta apartment half a dozen times, often showing up unannounced because Tameka lacked a working phone. Neighbors and building employees often knew her whereabouts when she didn't answer the door. Her residence was never in doubt.

Tameka was surprised to hear the district was questioning whether she lives in Atlanta and whether her children were eligible to attend their schools. "I'm not trying to run or hide," she said. "They're acting like I'm trying to hide or I'm a criminal."

Still, Tameka acknowledges how her depression and feelings of being overwhelmed clouded her judgment and ability to solve problems. "I never asked for help," she said. "I was trying to do things by myself."

When they enrolled, the four children took tests to see what grade they should enter. And the district has offered the children spots in summer school, Tameka said.

But their place in school is still provisional. The district admitted them without all of their documentation. Tameka had 30 days to take each child to the doctor and fill out a state-mandated health certificate evaluating their nutrition, eyesight, hearing and dental health.

She hasn't made all the appointments yet.

A gene long thought to just raise the risk for Alzheimer's may cause some cases

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the first time, researchers have identified a genetic form of late-in-life Alzheimer's disease — in people who inherit two copies of a worrisome gene.

Scientists have long known a gene called APOE4 is one of many things that can increase people's risk for Alzheimer's, including simply getting older. The vast majority of Alzheimer's cases occur after age 65. But research published Monday suggests that for people who carry not one but two copies of the gene, it's more than a risk factor, it's an underlying cause of the mind-robbing disease.

The findings mark a distinction with "profound implications," said Dr. Juan Fortea, who led the study the Sant Pau Research Institute in Barcelona, Spain.

Among them: Symptoms can begin seven to 10 years sooner than in other older adults who develop Alzheimer's.

An estimated 15% of Alzheimer's patients carry two copies of APOE4, meaning those cases "can be tracked back to a cause and the cause is in the genes," Fortea said. Until now, genetic forms of Alzheimer's were thought to be only types that strike at much younger ages and account for less than 1% of all cases.

Scientists say the research makes it critical to develop treatments that target the APOE4 gene. Some doctors won't offer the only drug that has been shown to modestly slow the disease, Leqembi, to people with the gene pair because they're especially prone to a dangerous side effect, said Dr. Reisa Sperling, a study coauthor at Harvard-affiliated Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

Sperling hunts ways to prevent or at least delay Alzheimer's and "this data for me says wow, what an important group to be able to go after before they become symptomatic."

But the news doesn't mean people should race for a gene test. "It's important not to scare everyone who has a family history" of Alzheimer's because this gene duo isn't behind most cases, she told The Associated Press.

HOW DO GENETICS AFFECT ALZHEIMER'S?

More than 6 million Americans, and millions more worldwide, have Alzheimer's. A handful of genes are known to cause rare "early-onset" forms, mutations passed through families that trigger symptoms unusually young, by age 50. Some cases also are linked to Down syndrome.

But Alzheimer's most commonly strikes after 65, especially in the late 70s to 80s, and the APOE gene — which also affects how the body handles fats -- was long known to play some role. There are three main varieties. Most people carry the APOE3 variant that appears to neither increase nor decrease Alzheimer's risk. Some carry APOE2, which provides some protection against Alzheimer's.

APOE4 has long been labeled the biggest genetic risk factor for late-in-life Alzheimer's, with two copies riskier than one. About 2% of the global population is estimated to have inherited a copy from each parent.

RESEARCH POINTS TO A CAUSE FOR A SUBSET OF ALZHEIMER'S

To better understand the gene's role, Fortea's team used data from 3,297 brains donated for research and from over 10,000 people in U.S. and European Alzheimer's studies. They examined symptoms and early hallmarks of Alzheimer's such as sticky amyloid in the brain.

People with two APOE4 copies were accumulating more amyloid at age 55 than those with just one copy or the "neutral" APOE3 gene variety, they reported in the journal Nature Medicine. By age 65, brain scans showed significant plaque buildup in nearly three-quarters of those double carriers — who also were more likely to have initial Alzheimer's symptoms around that age rather than in the 70s or 80s.

Fortea said the disease's underlying biology was remarkably similar to young inherited types.

It appears more like "a familial form of Alzheimer's," said Dr. Eliezer Masliah of the National Institute on Aging. "It is not just a risk factor."

Importantly, not everyone with two APOE4 genes develops Alzheimer's symptoms and researchers need to learn why, Sperling cautioned.

"It's not quite destiny," she said.

HOW THE NEW FINDINGS MAY AFFECT ALZHEIMER'S RESEARCH AND TREATMENT

The drug Leqembi works by clearing away some sticky amyloid but Sperling said it's not clear if carriers of two APOE4 genes benefit because they have such a high risk of a side effect from the drug – dangerous brain swelling and bleeding. One research question is whether they'd do better starting such drugs sooner than other people.

Masliah said other research aims to develop gene therapy or drugs to specifically target APOE4. He said it's also crucial to understand APOE4's effects in diverse populations since it's been studied mostly in white people of European ancestry.

As for gene tests, for now they're typically used only to evaluate if someone's a candidate for Leqembi or for people enrolling in Alzheimer's research – especially studies of possible ways to prevent the disease. Sperling said the people most likely to carry two APOE4 genes had parents who both got Alzheimer's relatively early, in their 60s rather than 80s.

Nervous about falling behind the GOP, Democrats are wrestling with how to use AI

By COURTNEY SUBRAMANIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden's campaign and Democratic candidates are in a fevered race with Republicans over who can best exploit the potential of artificial intelligence, a technology that could transform American elections — and perhaps threaten democracy itself.

Still smarting from being outmaneuvered on social media by Donald Trump and his allies in 2016, Democratic strategists said they are nevertheless treading carefully in embracing tools that trouble experts in disinformation. So far, Democrats said they are primarily using AI to help them find and motivate voters and better identify and overcome deceptive content.

"Candidates and strategists are still trying to figure out how to use AI in their work. People know it can save them time — the most valuable resource a campaign has," said Betsy Hoover, director of digital organizing for President Barack Obama's 2012 campaign and co-founder of the progressive venture capital firm Higher Ground Labs. "But they see the risk of misinformation and have been intentional about where and how they use it in their work."

Campaigns in both parties for years have used AI — powerful computer systems, software or processes that emulate aspects of human work and cognition — to collect and analyze data.

The recent developments in supercharged generative AI, however, have provided candidates and consultants with the ability to generate text and images, clone human voices and create video at unprecedented volume and speed.

That has led disinformation experts to issue increasingly dire warnings about the risks posed by AI's ability to spread falsehoods that could suppress or mislead voters, or incite violence, whether in the form of robocalls, social media posts or fake images and video.

Those concerns gained urgency after high-profile incidents that included the spread of AI-generated images of Trump, the former president, getting arrested in New York and an AI-created robocall that mimicked Biden's voice telling New Hampshire voters not to cast a ballot.

The Biden administration has sought to shape AI regulation through executive action, but Democrats overwhelmingly agree Congress needs to pass legislation to install safeguards around the technology.

Top tech companies have taken some steps to quell unease in Washington by announcing a commitment to regulate themselves. Major AI players, for example, entered into a pact to combat the use of AI-generated deepfakes, or deliberately manipulated images, around the world. But some experts said the voluntary effort is largely symbolic and congressional action is needed to prevent AI abuses.

Meanwhile, campaigns and their consultants have generally avoided talking about how they intend to use AI to avoid scrutiny and giving away trade secrets.

The Democratic Party has "gotten much better at just shutting up and doing the work and talking about it later," said Jim Messina, a veteran Democratic strategist who managed Obama's winning reelection campaign.

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The Trump campaign said in a statement that it “uses a set of proprietary algorithmic tools, like many other campaigns across the country, to help deliver emails more efficiently and prevent sign up lists from being populated by false information.” Spokesman Steven Cheung also said the campaign did not “engage or utilize” any tools supplied by an AI company, and declined to comment further.

The Republican National Committee, which declined to comment, has experimented with generative AI. In the hours after Biden announced his reelection bid last year, the RNC released an ad using artificial intelligence-generated images to depict GOP dystopian fears of a second Biden term: China invading Taiwan, boarded up storefronts, troops lining U.S. city streets and migrants crossing the U.S. border.

A key Republican champion of AI is Brad Parscale, the digital consultant who in 2016 teamed up with scandal-plagued Cambridge Analytica, a British data-mining firm, to hyper target social media users. Most strategists agree that the Trump campaign and other Republicans made better use of social media than Democrats during that cycle.

DEMOCRATS TREADING CAREFULLY

Scarred by the memories of 2016, the Biden campaign, Democratic candidates and progressives are wrestling with the power of artificial intelligence and nervous about not keeping up with the GOP in embracing the technology, according to interviews with consultants and strategists.

They want to use it in ways that maximize its capabilities without crossing ethical lines. But some said they fear using it could lead to charges of hypocrisy — they have long excoriated Trump and his allies for engaging in disinformation while the White House has prioritized reining in abuses associated with AI.

The Biden campaign said it is using AI to model and build audiences, draft and analyze email copy and generate content for volunteers to share in the field. The campaign is also testing AI’s ability to help volunteers categorize and analyze a host of data, including notes taken by volunteers after conversations with voters, whether while door-knocking or by phone or text message.

It has experimented with using AI to generate fundraising emails, which sometimes have turned out to be more effective than human-generated ones, according to a campaign official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to publicly discuss AI.

Biden campaign officials said they plan to explore using generative AI this cycle but will adhere to strict rules in deploying it. Among the tactics that are off limits: AI cannot be used to mislead voters, spread disinformation and deepfakes. The campaign also forbids the use of AI-generated content in advertising, social media and other such copy without a staff member’s review.

The campaign’s legal team has created a task force of lawyers and outside experts to respond to misinformation and disinformation, with a focus on AI-generated images and videos. The group is not unlike an internal team formed in the 2020 campaign — known as the “Malarkey Factory,” playing off Biden’s oft-used phrase, “What a bunch of malarkey.”

That group was tasked with monitoring what misinformation was gaining traction online. Rob Flaherty, Biden’s deputy campaign manager, said those efforts would continue and suggested some AI tools could be used to combat deepfakes and other such content before they go viral.

“The tools that we’re going to use to mitigate the myths and the disinformation is the same, it’s just going to have to be at a higher pace,” Flaherty said. “It just means we need to be more vigilant, pay more attention, be monitoring things in different places and try some new tools out, but the fundamentals remain the same.”

The Democratic National Committee said it was an early adopter of Google AI and uses some of its features, including ones that analyze voter registration records to identify patterns of voter removals or additions. It has also experimented with AI to generate fundraising email text and to help interpret voter data it has collected for decades, according to the committee.

Arthur Thompson, the DNC’s chief technology officer, said the organization believes generative AI is an “incredibly important and impactful technology” to help elect Democrats up and down the ballot.

“At the same time, it’s essential that AI is deployed responsibly and to enhance the work of our trained staff, not replace them. We can and must do both, which is why we will continue to keep safeguards in place as we remain at the cutting edge,” he said.

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PROGRESSIVE EXPERIMENTS

Progressive groups and some Democratic candidates have been more aggressively experimenting with AI. Higher Ground Labs — the venture capital firm co-founded by Hoover — established an innovation hub known as Progressive AI Lab and partners regularly with Zinc Collective and the Cooperative Impact Lab, two political tech coalitions focused on boosting Democratic candidates.

The goal was to create an ecosystem where progressive groups could streamline innovation, organize AI research and swap information about large language models, Hoover said.

Higher Ground Labs, which also works closely with the Biden campaign and DNC, has since funded 14 innovation grants, hosted forums that allow organizations and vendors to showcase their tools and held dozens of AI trainings.

More than 300 people attended an AI-focused conference the group held in January, Hoover said.

Jessica Alter, the co-founder and chair of Tech for Campaigns, a political nonprofit that uses data and digital marketing to fight extremism and help down-ballot Democrats, ran an AI-aided experiment across 14 campaigns in Virginia last year.

Emails written by AI, Alter said, brought in between three and four times more fundraising dollars per work hour compared with emails written by staff.

Alter said she is concerned that the party might be falling behind in AI because it is being too cautious.

"I understand the downsides of AI and we should address them," Alter said. "But the biggest concern I have right now is that fear is dominating the conversation in the political arena and that is not leading to balanced conversations or helpful outcomes."

HARD TO TALK ABOUT AN 'AK-47'

Rep. Adam Schiff, the Democratic front-runner in California's Senate race, is one of few candidates who have been open about using AI. His campaign manager, Brad Elkins, said the campaign has been using AI to improve its efficiency. It has teamed up with Quiller, a company that received funding from Higher Ground Labs and developed a tool that drafts, analyzes and automates fundraising emails.

The Schiff campaign has also experimented with other generative AI tools. During a fundraising drive last May, Schiff shared online an AI-generated image of himself as a Jedi. The caption read, "The Force is all around us. It's you. It's us. It's this grassroots team. #MayThe4thBeWithYou."

The campaign faced blowback online but was transparent about the lighthearted deepfake, which Elkins said is an important guardrail to integrating the technology as it becomes more widely available and less costly.

"I am still searching for a way to ethically use AI-generated audio and video of a candidate that is sincere," Elkins said, adding that it's difficult to envision progress until there's a willingness to regulate and legislate consequences for deceptive artificial intelligence.

The incident highlighted a challenge that all campaigns seem to be facing: even talking about AI can be treacherous.

"It's really hard to tell the story of how generative AI is a net positive when so many bad actors — whether that's robocalls, fake images or false video clips — are using the bad set of AI against us," said a Democratic strategist close to the Biden campaign who was granted anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly. "How do you talk about the benefits of an AK-47?"

Russia warns Britain and plans nuclear drills over the West's possible deepening role in Ukraine

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia on Monday threatened to strike British military facilities and said it would hold drills simulating the use of battlefield nuclear weapons amid sharply rising tensions over comments by senior Western officials about possibly deeper involvement in the war in Ukraine.

After summoning the British ambassador to the Foreign Ministry, Moscow warned that Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory with U.K.-supplied weapons could bring retaliatory strikes on British military facilities

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and equipment on Ukrainian soil or elsewhere.

The remarks came on the eve of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inauguration to a fifth term in office and in a week when Moscow on Thursday will celebrate Victory Day, its most important secular holiday, marking its defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.

The drills are a response to "provocative statements and threats of certain Western officials regarding the Russian Federation," the Defense Ministry said in a statement.

It was the first time Russia has publicly announced drills involving tactical nuclear weapons, although its strategic nuclear forces regularly hold exercises. Tactical nuclear weapons include air bombs, warheads for short-range missiles and artillery munitions and are meant for use on a battlefield. They are less powerful than the strategic weapons — massive warheads that arm intercontinental ballistic missiles and are intended to obliterate entire cities.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric expressed concern that various parties have been talking about issues regarding nuclear weapons more and more recently.

"Current nuclear risks are at an alarmingly high level," Dujarric said. "All actions that could lead to miscalculation, escalation with catastrophic consequences, must be avoided."

The Russian announcement was a warning to Ukraine's Western allies about becoming more deeply engaged in the 2-year-old war, where the Kremlin's forces have gained an upper hand amid Ukraine's shortage of manpower and weapons. Some of Ukraine's Western partners have previously expressed concern that the conflict could spill beyond Ukraine into a war between NATO and Russia.

French President Emmanuel Macron repeated last week that he doesn't exclude sending troops to Ukraine, and U.K. Foreign Secretary David Cameron said Kyiv's forces will be able to use British long-range weapons to strike targets inside Russia. Some other NATO countries providing weapons to Kyiv have balked at that possibility.

The Kremlin branded those comments as dangerous, heightening tension between Russia and NATO. The war already has placed significant strain on relations between Moscow and the West.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday that Macron's recent statement and other remarks by British and U.S. officials had prompted the nuclear drills.

"It's a new round of escalation," Peskov said, referring to what the Kremlin regarded as provocative statements. "It's unprecedented and requires special attention and special measures."

Russia's Foreign Ministry summoned both the French and British ambassadors. It urged the British ambassador "to think about the inevitable catastrophic consequences of such hostile steps from London."

Sweden's Foreign Minister Tobias Billström said the nuclear exercises "contribute to increasing instability."

"In the current security situation, Russia's actions may be considered particularly irresponsible and reckless," Billström told Swedish news agency TT.

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy head of Russia's Security Council that's chaired by Putin, said in his typically hawkish fashion that the comments by Macron and Cameron risked pushing the nuclear-armed world toward a "global catastrophe."

It wasn't the first time Europe's military support for Ukraine has prompted nuclear saber-rattling. In March 2023, after the U.K.'s decision to provide Ukraine with armor-piercing shells containing depleted uranium, Putin said he intends to deploy tactical nuclear weapons on the territory of Ukraine neighbor Belarus.

The ministry said the exercise is intended to "increase the readiness of non-strategic nuclear forces to fulfill combat tasks" and will be held on Putin's orders. The maneuvers will involve missile units of the Southern Military District along with the air force and the navy, it said.

The Russian announcement stirred little reaction in Ukraine, where the spokesman for the Military Intelligence agency, Andrii Yusov, said on national television: "Nuclear blackmail is a usual practice of Putin's regime; it does not constitute major news."

Western officials have blamed Russia for threatening a wider war through provocative acts. NATO countries said last week they are deeply concerned by a campaign of hybrid activities on the military alliance's soil, accusing Moscow of being behind them and saying they represent a security threat.

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Peskov dismissed those claims as "new, unfounded accusations leveled at our country."

Germany said Monday it recalled its ambassador to Russia for a week of consultations in Berlin following an alleged computer hack of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's party.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian drones hit two vehicles Monday in Russia's Belgorod region, killing six people and injuring 35 others, including two children, local authorities said. The area has been hit by Kyiv's forces in recent months.

One of the vehicles was a minibus carrying farm workers, Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said.

It was not possible to independently confirm the report.

While Ukraine's army is largely pinned down on the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line due to a shortage of troops and ammunition after more than two years of fighting, it has used its long-range firepower to hit targets deep inside Russia.

In what has largely been a war of attrition, Russia also has relied heavily on long-range missile, artillery and drones to wreak damage on Ukraine.

The Kremlin's forces kept up their bombardment of Ukraine's power grid, with a nighttime Russian drone attack targeting energy infrastructure in Ukraine's northern region of Sumy. Multiple towns and villages in the region, including Sumy, lost power, regional authorities said.

Russia attacked Ukrainian targets with 13 Shahed drones overnight, 12 of which were intercepted in the Sumy region, Ukraine's air force said.

Brittney Griner still adjusting after Russian prison ordeal.

WNBA star details experience in book

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Brittney Griner continues her efforts to settle into a normal routine following her release from a Russian prison 17 months ago.

Life isn't what it once was for the perennial WNBA All-Star.

The 6-foot-8 center looks different and has different priorities. Gone are her familiar dreadlocks that couldn't be maintained during her incarceration. She regularly sees a therapist to help her cope after being imprisoned for 10 months. And since her release, Griner has been an advocate for the return of other Americans detained overseas.

She has met with President Joe Biden twice since her release, including once last month in Phoenix.

"Got to talk to him about a couple of people and just keep it on the forefront of everyone's mind," the Phoenix Mercury star said in a phone interview with The Associated Press. "You want to get exposure and that keeps it on the forefront of people's minds. Keep people accountable."

Griner was detained at a Moscow airport in February 2022. Russian authorities said a search of her luggage revealed vape cartridges containing oil derived from cannabis.

She shares details about the harrowing experience in her new book — "Coming Home" — which comes out Tuesday.

Griner hopes one takeaway for anyone who reads the book will be a vivid picture of what detainees have to endure. She said it's why it took her all of last season to write it with Michelle Burford.

"I didn't leave anything out from the detainment, to being over there, the conditions. As much as we could fit into a book, we basically did," Griner said. "People will be shocked at some of the things.

"I hope it brings a little bit more of an understanding to the conditions that detainees go through."

Griner says it is important people have a clear picture of what it's like for those Americans not home yet, including Paul Whelan and Evan Gershkovich, so that no one gives up the fight.

"It took everyone to come together to bring me home," she said. Government officials "have to make really hard decisions."

Griner, who first met President Biden at the White House Correspondent's dinner in 2023 a few months after her return to the U.S., said she and her WNBA teammates must keep the momentum going to get

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everyone home.

"How are we going to do it? Bringing in families, playing videos, give them airtime?" she said. "Maybe someone that doesn't know, sees (the book) and they write a letter to Congress that tips over the scale to get someone home."

Griner said her days of playing basketball overseas during the WNBA offseason are over.

Though many WNBA players still play in international leagues to supplement their league salaries, Griner said she is done, except with USA Basketball. She hopes to be on the Olympic team at the Paris Games this summer, and the odds are in her favor that will happen.

Griner had played in China for a few years during the WNBA offseason, before making the move to Russia — where she had played since 2015 before her arrest.

It's not just her ordeal in Russia, however, that is going to keep her home. Griner's wife, Cherelle, is expecting the couple's first child.

"The only time I'll go overseas is with Team USA," Griner said. "I need to be in the states. About to be a parent. Last thing I want to do is be in and out of my kid's life. I want to be there for everything. I don't want to uproot my family and take them overseas with me. It's too much."

Griner, who has been an advocate for mental health for the past decade, said she sees a therapist regularly — something she did for several years before she went to Russia — and it helps her process what she endured while in prison.

"They are instrumental to my mental health," Griner said about her sessions. "Everyone can benefit from having someone to talk to. Someone outside of their every day life. It just helps to have a different perspective on life from someone."

"That way if you do feel nervous or struggling with something, it's very beneficial."

The 33-year-old took a mental health break for several days last summer during the WNBA season, missing three games. She'll begin her 12th year in the league May 14.

Griner is looking forward to it after the welcome she received in her return last year. One of the only positives that Griner will take away from her ordeal was the outpouring of support she received from people in the form of letters they wrote to her in prison.

"The letters were amazing from the fans, teammates, opponents, GMs, they all meant so much to me," she said. "It was very dark at times, especially going through the trial. When I was in isolation for weeks, it was an emotional rollercoaster and those letters made me remember that I wasn't forgotten."

The UN says there's 'full-blown famine' in northern Gaza.

What does that mean?

By SAM MEDNICK and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The head of the United Nations World Food Program says northern Gaza has entered "full-blown famine" after nearly seven months of war between Israel and Hamas. But a formal, and highly sensitive, famine declaration faces the complications of politics and of confirming how many people have died.

Cindy McCain in an NBC interview broadcast Sunday said severe Israeli restrictions on humanitarian deliveries to the territory that has long relied on outside food assistance have pushed civilians in the most isolated, devastated part of Gaza over the brink. Famine was now moving south in Gaza, she said.

A WFP spokesman later told The Associated Press that one of the three benchmarks for a formal famine declaration has already been met in northern Gaza and another is nearly met — important details on how far the effort to document deadly hunger has progressed.

Israel faces mounting pressure from top ally the United States and others to let more aid into Gaza, notably by opening more land crossings for the most efficient delivery by truck. Aid groups say deliveries by air and sea by the United States and other countries cannot meet the needs of Gaza's 2.3 million people, a growing number of them reaching the stage of malnutrition where a child's growth is stunted

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and deaths occur.

Famine had been projected in parts of Gaza this month in a March report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a global initiative that includes WFP as a partner. It said nearly a third of Gaza's population was experiencing the highest level of catastrophic hunger, and that could rise to nearly half by July.

The next IPC report is expected in July. Israel strongly rejects any claims of famine in Gaza, and its humanitarian agency called McCain's assertion incorrect. A formal declaration could be used as evidence at the International Criminal Court as well as at the International Court of Justice, where Israel faces allegations of genocide in a case brought by South Africa.

Here's what we know about famine and the hunger crisis in Gaza.

WHAT A FAMINE MEANS

According to the IPC, an area is considered to be in famine when three things occur: 20% of households have an extreme lack of food, or essentially starving; at least 30% of children suffer from acute malnutrition or wasting, meaning they're too thin for their height; and two adults or four children per every 10,000 people are dying daily of hunger and its complications.

In northern Gaza, the first condition of extreme lack of food has been met, senior WFP spokesman Steve Taravella told The Associated Press. The second condition of child acute malnutrition is nearly met, he said. But the death rate could not be verified.

Doing so is difficult. Aid groups note that Israeli airstrikes and raids have devastated medical facilities in northern Gaza and displaced much of the population. Along with restrictions on access, they complicate the ability to formally collect data on deaths.

A document explaining famine published in March by the IPC noted, however, that an area can be classified as "famine with reasonable evidence" if two of the three thresholds have been reached and analysts believe from available evidence that the third likely has been reached.

"The bottom line is that people are practically dying from a lack of food, water and medicines. If we are waiting for the moment when all the facts are in hand to verify the final conditions to scientifically declare a famine, it would be after thousands of people have perished," Taravella said.

THE CAUSES OF CATASTROPHIC HUNGER

Shortly after Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, Israel sealed its borders with Gaza and for weeks prevented aid from entering. Aid groups have said assistance since then has been restricted to a trickle far below the 500 trucks of aid that entered before the war. Since March, as Israel has pointed to progress, an average of 171 trucks per day have entered Gaza, according to the U.S.-established Famine Early Warning Systems Network.

Once inside Gaza, food and other aid doesn't always reach the most vulnerable. Aid groups say access is limited, particularly in the north, due to ongoing fighting and a chaotic security situation.

Northern Gaza, including Gaza City, was the first target of Israel's invasion and became the epicenter of the hunger crisis, with many residents reduced to eating animal feed and foraging for weeds. The IPC report in March said around 210,000 people in the north were in catastrophic levels of hunger.

The very young, the very old and those with health problems are the most affected. On Sunday, a 6-year-old from northern Gaza with cystic fibrosis was taken to the United States on a humanitarian flight after his mother made a video pleading for help. Fadi Al-Zant's jutting ribs and thin arms showed advanced malnutrition.

HOW TO AVERT A FAMINE

Humanitarian groups say it will be difficult to deliver life-saving aid without a cease-fire. Even with a pause in fighting, some experts say the situation in northern Gaza will have life-lasting consequences, especially for newborns and pregnant women.

While Israel has allowed more aid in recent weeks under international pressure, a humanitarian official for the U.S. Agency for International Development told the AP that since March, northern Gaza has not received anything like the aid needed to stave off famine. USAID made the official available on condition of the official's anonymity, citing security concerns over his work in conflict.

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Secretary of State Antony Blinken has welcomed Israel's recent steps to increase deliveries but stressed such moves must be sustained. That's not easy. Israel on Sunday closed its main crossing point for delivering aid after a Hamas attack killed soldiers.

VOICES FROM GAZA

Some Palestinians say the increase in aid has eased things slightly, especially by lowering the cost of food. Gaza City resident Said Siam said prices have dropped in recent weeks. Still, the 18-year-old said he and family members have each lost at least 10 kilograms (22 pounds) since the start of the war, mostly eating one meal of pumpkin soup each day. Fruits, vegetables and fresh meat are still scarce.

Panama's new president-elect, José Raúl Mulino, was a late entry in the race

By JUAN ZAMORANO Associated Press

PANAMA CITY (AP) — José Raúl Mulino said he was practically retired from politics just over six months ago.

Now, he'll be Panama's president for the next five years.

Standing before a pack of supporters Sunday night, Mulino said: "I never imagined this."

In a historic and tumultuous election, preliminary results put Mulino on top to lead the normally sleepy Central American nation through a moment of political tension, historic migration and a struggling economy.

The 64-year-old lawyer, whose last position in politics was as minister of security in then President Ricardo Martinelli's 2009-2014 administration, was initially tapped by the popular former leader to be his running mate after Martinelli's wife declined.

But then Martinelli was disqualified from running after he was sentenced to more than 10 years in prison for a money laundering conviction. Mulino took his place, and ended up winning Sunday's presidential election with nearly 35% of the vote and a nine-point lead over his nearest opponent after dodging constitutional challenges to his own candidacy.

The president-elect got there with strong support from Martinelli, arguably the most important tool in Mulino's campaign as he rode the fiery ex-leader's popularity to victory.

While he lacks Martinelli's charisma, the economic boom seen under his ally pushed many voters to support Mulino at a time that Panama's economy has lagged.

The former president, who has been sheltering in the Nicaraguan Embassy since February after receiving political asylum, said his trust for Mulino dates back 30 years.

"Mulino seems a little tough, but he is a good guy, serious, and is the only one prepared to take on this great challenge and knows how the economy works to lift the country," Martinelli said in a video broadcast to supporters at Mulino's campaign close.

A maritime law attorney who graduated from Tulane University in New Orleans, Mulino became known as a private business leader who took part in a civil movement against the dictatorship of Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, who was ousted by an American invasion on Dec. 20, 1989.

He acted as vice minister of foreign affairs in the 1989-1994 administration of President Guillermo Endara, who took office after the fall of Noriega and the end of the Panamanian military regime. Mulino later remained in charge of the country's international policy in the last part of that administration.

Mulino remained active in politics and more than a decade later backed Martinelli in the election that the supermarket magnate won in 2009. Mulino was appointed minister of the interior and justice, later taking the reins of the public security office.

Mulino says one of the achievements during that time was to "recover" a swath of Panama on the border with Colombia, known as the Darien Gap, which "was in the hands of the narco-guerrillas" of the neighboring country.

As president, he has promised to stop soaring levels of migration through the Darien jungles, where more than a half million people crossed last year, though experts question the viability of his plan due to

the sheer quantities of vulnerable people traveling through the passage.

"I will make the effort to end this migratory crisis in our territory with respect for human rights and with sincere international participation," Mulino said at the closing of his campaign last week.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted that controlling migration was one of the countries' shared goals in congratulating Mulino for his victory.

"I look forward to continuing our strategic partnership and advancing our shared goals of democratic governance and inclusive economic prosperity," Blinken said in a statement Monday. "Looking ahead, the United States will continue to work with Panama on our common goals of inclusive, sustainable economic growth, bolstering citizen security, and cooperatively curbing irregular migration through the Darien."

As security minister, he was also the target of harsh criticisms following police repression of a protest of Indigenous banana growers in the northern provinces of Bocas del Toro and Chiriqui in 2010. The crackdown left two dead and more than 100 injured by pellet shots, among them some with eye injuries.

"He was quite severe in controlling social protests," Panamanian political analyst Rodrigo Noriega told The Associated Press before the election. "There are a lot of unknowns about him."

With help from AI, Randy Travis got his voice back. Here's how his first song post-stroke came to be

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

With some help from artificial intelligence, country music star Randy Travis, celebrated for his timeless hits like "Forever and Ever, Amen" and "I Told You So," has his voice back.

In July 2013, Travis was hospitalized with viral cardiomyopathy, a virus that attacks the heart, and later suffered a stroke. The Country Music Hall of Famer had to relearn how to walk, spell and read in the years that followed. A condition called aphasia limits his ability to speak — it's why his wife Mary Travis assists him in interviews. It's also why he hasn't released new music in over a decade, until now.

"Where That Came From," which released Friday, is a rich acoustic ballad amplified by Travis' immediately recognizable, soulful vocal tone.

Cris Lacy, Warner Music Nashville co-president, approached Randy and Mary Travis and asked: "What if we could take Randy's voice and recreate it using AI?" Mary Travis told The Associated Press over Zoom last week, Randy smiling in agreement right next to her. "Well, we were all over that, so we were so excited."

"All I ever wanted since the day of a stroke was to hear that voice again."

Lacy tapped developers in London to create a proprietary AI model to begin the process. The result was two models: One with 12 vocal stems (or song samples), and another with 42 stems collected across Travis' career — from 1985 to 2013, says Kyle Lehning, Travis' longtime producer. Lacy and Lehning chose to use "Where That Came From," a song written by Scotty Emerick and John Scott Sherrill that Lehning co-produced and held on to for years. He believed it could best articulate the humanity of Travis' idiosyncratic vocal style.

"I never even thought about another song," Lehning said.

Once he input the demo vocal (sung by James Dupree) into the AI models, "it took about five minutes to analyze," says Lehning. "I really wish somebody had been here with a camera because I was the first person to hear it. And it was stunning, to me, how good it was sort of right off the bat. It's hard to put an equation around it, but it was probably 70, 75% what you hear now."

"There were certain aspects of it that were not authentic to Randy's performance," he said, so he began to edit and build on the recording with engineer Casey Wood, who also worked closely with Travis over a few decades.

The pair cherry-picked from the two models, and made alterations to things like vibrato speed, or slowing and relaxing phrases. "Randy is a laid-back singer," Lehning says. "Randy, in my opinion, had an old soul quality to his voice. That's one of the things that made him unique, but also, somehow familiar."

His vocal performance on "Where That Came From" had to reflect that fact.

"We were able to just improve on it," Lehning says of the AI recording. "It was emotional, and it's still emotional."

Mary Travis says the "human element," and "the people that are involved" in this project, separate it from more nefarious uses of AI in music.

"Randy, I remember watching him when he first heard the song after it was completed. It was beautiful because at first, he was surprised, and then he was very pensive, and he was listening and studying," she said. "And then he put his head down and his eyes were a little watery. I think he went through every emotion there was, in those three minutes of just hearing his voice again."

Lacy agrees. "The beauty of this is, you know, we're doing it with a voice that the world knows and has heard and has been comforted by," she says.

"But I think, just on human terms, it's a very real need. And it's a big loss when you lose the voice of someone that you were connected to, and the ability to have it back is a beautiful gift."

They also hope that this song will work to educate people on the good that AI can do — not the fraudulent activities that so frequently make headlines. "We're hoping that maybe we can set a standard," Mary Travis says, where credit is given where credit is due — and artists have control over their voice and work.

Last month, over 200 artists signed an open letter submitted by the Artist Rights Alliance non-profit, calling on artificial intelligence tech companies, developers, platforms, digital music services and platforms to stop using AI "to infringe upon and devalue the rights of human artists." Artists who co-signed included Stevie Wonder, Miranda Lambert, Billie Eilish, Nicki Minaj, Peter Dinklage, Katy Perry, Smokey Robinson and J Balvin.

So, now that "Where That Came From" is here, will there be more original Randy Travis songs in the future?

"There may be others," says Mary Travis. "We'll see where this goes. This is such a foreign territory. There's likely more on the horizon."

"We do have other tracks," says Lacy, but Warner Music is being as selective. "This isn't a stunt, and it's not a parlor trick," she added. "It was important to have a song worthy of him."

Brad Parscale helped Trump win in 2016 using Facebook ads.

Now he's back, and an AI evangelist

By GARANCE BURKE and ALAN SUDERMAN Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Donald Trump's former campaign manager looked squarely into the camera and promised his viewers they were about to witness a bold new era in politics.

"You're going to see some of the most amazing new technology in artificial intelligence that's going to replace polling in the future across the country," said Brad Parscale in a dimly lit promotional video accented by hypnotic beats.

Parscale, the digital campaign operative who helped engineer Trump's 2016 presidential victory, vows that his new, AI-powered platform will dramatically overhaul not just polling but also campaigning. His AI-powered tools, he has boasted, will outperform big tech companies and usher in a wave of conservative victories worldwide.

It's not the first time Parscale has proclaimed that new technologies will boost right-wing campaigns. He was the digital guru who teamed up with scandal-plagued Cambridge Analytica and helped propel Trump to the White House eight years ago. In 2020, he had a public blowup then a private falling out with his old boss after the Capitol riot. Now he's back, playing an under-the-radar role to help Trump, the presumptive GOP nominee, in his race against Democratic President Joe Biden.

Parscale says his company, Campaign Nucleus can use AI to help generate customized emails, parse oceans of data to gauge voter sentiment and find persuadable voters, then amplify the social media posts of "anti-woke" influencers, according to an Associated Press review of Parscale's public statements, his company websites, slide decks, marketing materials and other documents not previously made public.

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Since last year, Campaign Nucleus and other Parscale-linked companies have been paid more than \$2.2 million by the Trump campaign, the Republican National Committee and their related political action and fundraising committees, campaign finance records show.

While his firms have received only a small piece of Trump's total digital spending, Parscale remains close to top Republicans, as well as senior officials at the campaign and at the RNC, according to a GOP operative familiar with Parscale's role who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal dynamics.

Lara Trump, the RNC's new co-chair and Trump's daughter-in-law, once worked as a consultant to a company co-owned by Parscale. And U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson's campaign recently hired Campaign Nucleus, campaign finance records show.

Parscale, however, is not involved in day-to-day Trump campaign operations, the GOP operative said.

Parscale's ability to use AI to micro target supporters and tap them for campaign cash could prove critical for Trump's campaign and other fundraising organizations. They have seen a falloff in contributions from smaller donors and a surge in spending — at least \$77 million so far — on attorneys defending the former president in a slew of criminal and civil cases.

Beyond Trump, Parscale has said he's harnessed AI to supercharge conservative candidates and causes across the globe, including in Israel, the Balkans and Brazil.

NEW AI-POWERED CAMPAIGN TOOLS

Parscale is hardly alone in using machine learning to try to give candidates an edge by predicting, pinpointing and motivating likely supporters to vote and donate money. Politicians at all levels are experimenting with chatbots and other generative AI tools to write speeches, ad copy and fundraising appeals.

Some Democrats have voiced concern over being outmaneuvered by Republicans on AI, much like they were on social media advertising eight years ago. So far, the Biden campaign and other Democrats said they are using AI to help them find and motivate voters and to better identify and defeat disinformation.

Election experts say they are concerned about AI's potential to upend elections around the world through convincing deepfakes and other content that could mislead voters. Free and low-cost generative AI services have grown in sophistication, and officials worry they can be used to smear a candidate or steer voters to avoid the polls, eroding the public's trust in what they see and hear.

Parscale has the financial backing to experiment to see what works in ways that other AI evangelists may not. That is thanks, in part, to his association with a Texas billionaire who is among the state's most influential political donors.

Parscale did not respond to multiple messages from AP seeking comment. The RNC declined comment as well.

AI IS 'SO SCARY'

Trump has called artificial intelligence "so scary" and "dangerous." His campaign, which has shied away from highlighting Parscale's role, said in an emailed statement that it did not "engage or utilize" tools supplied by any AI company.

"The campaign uses a set of proprietary algorithmic tools, like many other campaigns across the country, to help deliver emails more efficiently and prevent sign-up lists from being populated by false information," said campaign spokesman Steven Cheung.

While political consultants often hype their tactics to land new contracts, they can also be intensely secretive about the details of that work to avoid assisting rivals. That makes it difficult to precisely track how Parscale is deploying AI for the Trump campaign, or more broadly.

Parscale has said Campaign Nucleus can send voters customized emails and use data analytics to predict voters' feelings. The platform can also amplify "anti-woke" influencers who have large followings on social media, according to his company's documents and videos.

Parscale said his company also can use artificial intelligence to create "stunning web pages in seconds" that produce content that looks like a media outlet, according to a presentation he gave last month at a political conference, where he was not advertised in advance as a speaker.

"Empower your team to create their own news," said another slide, according to the presentation viewed by AP.

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Soon, Parscale says, his company will deploy an app that harnesses AI to assist campaigns in collecting absentee ballots in the same way DoorDash or Grubhub drivers pick up dinners from restaurants and deliver them to customers.

Chris Wilson, a Republican strategist who recently worked for a SuperPAC backing Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' failed presidential bid, said he has seen Campaign Nucleus' platform and was "envious" of its capabilities and simplicity.

"Somebody could download Nucleus, start working with it and really begin to use it," said Wilson.

Other political consultants, however, called Parscale's AI-infused sales pitch largely a rehash of what campaigns already have mastered through data scraping, ad testing and modeling to predict voter behavior.

"Some of this stuff is just simply not new, it's been around for a long time. The only thing new is that we're just calling it AI," said Amanda Elliott, a GOP digital strategist.

FROM UNKNOWN TO TRUMP CONFIDANT

Parscale, a relatively unknown web designer in San Antonio, got his start working for Trump when he was hired to build a web presence for the business mogul's family business.

That led to a job on the future president's 2016 campaign. He was one of its first hires and spearheaded an ambitious and unorthodox digital initiative that relied on an extensive database of social media accounts and content to target voters with Facebook ads.

"I pretty much used Facebook to get Trump elected in 2016," Parscale said in a 2022 podcast interview.

To better target Facebook users, in particular, the campaign teamed up with Cambridge Analytica, a British datamining firm bankrolled by Robert Mercer, a wealthy and influential GOP donor. After the election, Cambridge Analytica dissolved, facing investigations over its role in a breach of 87 million Facebook accounts.

Following Trump's surprise win, Parscale's influence grew. He was promoted to manage Trump's reelection bid and enjoyed celebrity status. A towering figure at 6 feet, 8 inches with a Viking-style beard, Parscale was frequently spotted at campaign rallies taking selfies with Trump supporters and signing autographs.

Parscale was replaced as campaign manager not long after a rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, drew an unexpectedly small crowd, enraging Trump.

His personal life unraveled, culminating in a standoff with police at his Florida home after his wife reported he had multiple firearms and was threatening to hurt himself. One of the responding officers reported he saw bruising on the arms of Parscale's wife. Parscale complied with a court order to turn in his firearms and was not charged in connection with the incident.

Parscale briefly decided to quit politics and privately expressed regret for associating with Trump after the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot. In a text to a former campaign colleague, he wrote he felt "guilty for helping him win" in 2016, according to the House committee that investigated the Capitol attack.

His disgust didn't last long. Campaign Nucleus set up Trump's website after Silicon Valley tech companies throttled his access to their platforms.

By the summer of 2022, Parscale had resumed complimenting his old boss on a podcast popular among GOP politicians.

"With President Trump, he really was the guy driving the message. He was the chief strategist of his own political uprising and management," Parscale said. "I think what the family recognized was: I had done everything that really the campaign needs to do."

PARSCALE'S PLATFORM

Trump's 2024 campaign website now links directly to Parscale's company and displays that it's "Powered by Nucleus," as Parscale often refers to his new firm. The campaign and its related political action and campaign committees have paid Campaign Nucleus more than \$800,000 since early 2023, according to Federal Election Commission filings.

Two other companies — Dyspachit Email and Text Services and BCVM Services — are listed on campaign finance records as being located at the same Florida address used by Campaign Nucleus. The firms, which are registered in Delaware and whose ownership is unclear, have received \$1.4 million from the Trump campaign and related entities, FEC records show.

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When an AP reporter last month visited Campaign Nucleus' small, unmarked office in a tony section of Fort Lauderdale, an employee said she did not know anything about Dyspatchit or BCVM.

"We don't talk to reporters," the employee said.

The three companies have been paid to host websites, send emails, provide fundraising software and provide digital consulting, FEC records show.

Parscale markets Campaign Nucleus as a one-stop shop for conservative candidates who want to automate tasks usually done by campaign workers or volunteers.

The company says it has helped its clients raise \$119 million and has sent nearly 14 billion emails on their behalf, according to a promotional video.

At his recent appearance at the political conference, Parscale presented a slide that said Campaign Nucleus had raised three times as much as tech giant Salesforce in head-to-head tests for email fundraising.

Campaign Nucleus specializes in mining information from a politician's supporters, according to a recent presentation slide.

For example, when someone signs up to attend an event, Nucleus uses AI to analyze reams of personal data to assign that person a numerical score. Attendees who have been to past events receive a high score, for example, ranking them as most likely to show up, according to a company video posted online.

Campaign Nucleus also can track where people who sign up live and can send them customized emails asking for donations or solicit their help on the campaign, the video shows.

Parscale said two years ago in a podcast that he had received more than 10,000 requests about Campaign Nucleus from nearly every country with a conservative party. More recently, he said his team has been active in multiple countries, including in India and Israel, where he's been "helping over there a lot with the war with Hamas."

The company says it has offices in Texas, Florida and North Carolina and has been on a recruiting tear. Recent job listings have included U.S. and Latin America-based intelligence analysts to use AI for framing messages and generating content, as well as a marketer to "coordinate influencer campaigns."

Campaign Nucleus has also entered into partnerships with other companies with an AI focus. In 2022, the firm announced it was teaming up with Phunware, a Texas-based company that built a cellphone app for Trump's 2020 bid that allowed staff to monitor the movements of his millions of supporters and mobilize their social networks.

Since then, Phunware obtained a patent for what a company official described as "experiential AI" that can locate people's cellphones geographically, predict their travel patterns and influence their consumer behavior.

Phunware did not answer specific questions about the partnership with Nucleus, saying the company's client engagements were confidential.

"However, it is well-known that we developed the 2020 Trump campaign app in collaboration with Campaign Nucleus. We have had discussions with Trump campaign leadership about potentially developing their app for the 2024 election," said spokeswoman Christina Lockwood.

PARSCALE'S VISION

Last year, Parscale bought property in Midland, Texas, in the heart of the nation's highest-producing oil and gas fields. It is also the hometown of Tim Dunn, a billionaire born-again evangelical who is among the state's most influential political donors.

Over the years, the organizations and campaigns Dunn has funded have pushed Texas politics further to the right and driven successful challenges to unseat incumbent Republican officials deemed too centrist.

In April 2023, Dunn invested \$5 million in a company called AiAdvertising that once bought one of Parscale's firms under a previous corporate name. The San Antonio-based ad firm also announced that Parscale was joining as a strategic adviser, to be paid \$120,000 in stock and a monthly salary of \$10,000.

"Boom!" Parscale tweeted. "(AiAdvertising) finally automated the full stack of technologies used in the 2016 election that changed the world."

In June, AiAdvertising added two key national figures to its board: Texas investor Thomas Hicks Jr. – for-

mer co-chair of the RNC and longtime hunting buddy of Donald Trump Jr. -- and former GOP congressman Jim Renacci. In December, Dunn also gave \$5 million to MAGA Inc., a pro-Trump super PAC and Campaign Nucleus client. And in January, SEC filings show Dunn provided AiAdvertising an additional \$2.5 million via his investment company. A company press release said the cash infusion would help it "generate more engaging, higher-impact campaigns."

Dunn declined to comment, although in an October episode of his podcast he elaborated on how his political work is driven by his faith.

"Jesus won't be on the ballot, OK? Now, eventually, he's going to take over the government and we can look forward to that," Dunn told listeners. "In the meanwhile, we're going to have to settle."

In business filings, AiAdvertising said it has developed AI-created "personas" to determine what messages will resonate emotionally with its customers' target audience. Parscale said last year in a promotional video that Campaign Nucleus was using AI models in a similar way.

"We actually understand what the American people want to hear," Parscale said.

AiAdvertising did not respond to messages seeking comment.

Parscale occasionally offers glimpses of the AI future he envisions. Casting himself as an outsider to the Republican establishment, he has said he sees AI as a way to undercut elite Washington consultants, whom he described as political parasites.

In January, Parscale told a crowd assembled at a grassroots Christian event at a church in Pasadena, California, that their movement needed "to have our own AI, from creative large language models and creative imagery, we need to reach our own audiences with our own distribution, our own email systems, our own texting systems, our own ability to place TV ads, and lastly we need to have our own influencers."

To make his point plain, he turned to a metaphor that relied on a decidedly 19th-century technology.

"We must not rely on any of their rails," he said, referring to mainstream media and companies. "This is building our own train tracks."

They shared a name — but not a future.

How two kids fought to escape poverty in Baltimore

By LEA SKENE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — Growing up in the streets of east Baltimore surrounded by poverty and gun violence, two kids named Antonio became fast friends. Both called "Tone," they were similarly charismatic and ambitious, dreaming of the day they would finally leave behind the struggles that defined their childhoods.

One has. The other never will.

Antonio Lee was shot and killed last summer. In the weeks that followed, his friend Antonio Moore warned their peers about the consequences of retaliation, trying to prevent more needless bloodshed and stolen futures in a city that consistently ranks among the nation's most violent.

"This s--- will keep going for the next 20 years, or it'll stop," Moore said at Lee's funeral service in August. "Y'all gotta make a choice."

Moore, 24, is a successful real estate investor and entrepreneur. He founded a consulting company that helps brands and nonprofits connect with urban youth. His accomplishments serve as a reminder of what's possible.

Moore said Lee was committed to forging a similar path; he just didn't have enough time to see it through.

How was Moore able to break the negative cycles of his youth while Lee fell victim to them?

It's a question with no simple answers, but their disparate fates highlight the sometimes insurmountable challenges facing young Black men from Baltimore's poorest neighborhoods and similar communities across the country. They live in a world where rampant gun violence often draws an arbitrary line between life and death, where the fight for survival is constant and trauma is passed down through generations.

And the hurdles don't stop there: underperforming schools, limited job opportunities, inadequate public transportation, inaccessible health care, housing insecurity and an embattled criminal justice system that

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disproportionately locks up people of color. Guns and drugs are readily available. Hope is hard to come by. Beating the odds is possible, but it requires an extraordinary combination of hard work and good luck. Above all, it requires time.

On the afternoon of his death, Lee was washing windshields at a busy northeast Baltimore intersection when gunfire broke out. His loved ones believe he was killed over a dispute between rival groups from different sections of east Baltimore. No arrests have been made in the case.

Lee died about four months before his 20th birthday. A second victim survived his injuries.

Stories like this are painfully common in Baltimore even as the city's homicide rate overall trends downward. Lee's life unfolded in forgotten communities suffering from decades of population loss and unchecked drug activity. He attended Baltimore's underfunded public schools. Money was tight at home.

He came from a loving family, but his childhood was punctuated by tragedy. A brother was shot to death in North Carolina and a sister died from brain cancer. As the youngest child, Lee clung to his mother and surviving sister for support.

Several of his close friends were killed as teenagers, including a Baltimore high school football player whose death rocked the city two years ago when he was gunned down in his school's parking lot less than an hour before a scheduled home game.

Lee mourned them all, and he was acutely aware of the danger he faced simply operating in his environment, according to friends and family. That's one reason he was fighting to get out.

Statistically, he was fighting a losing battle. Black children grow up in some of the country's poorest households. Compared to their white counterparts, research shows they're significantly less likely to achieve upward economic mobility: About three-quarters of Black children born in the lowest income bracket will remain there for the rest of their lives. They're also about five times more likely to die in gunfire.

Lee talked about moving to Atlanta or maybe Florida, somewhere he would feel safer. He just needed to save up enough money to make it happen.

He was constantly brainstorming potential business opportunities — everything from music production and real estate investment to trash collection.

He started working at McDonald's and considered taking culinary classes. He loved to cook and bake. His funeral program listed some of his favorite dishes: pasta, chicken wings, banana pudding.

Lee was enrolled in one of Baltimore's flagship anti-violence programs through the nonprofit Roca, which provides mentoring, job training, GED classes and other services. He was meeting with his mentor regularly; they last spoke just hours before the shooting while Lee was brushing his teeth. Despite having a mouthful of toothpaste, he answered the phone with his signature greeting, an enthusiastic "Hey baby!"

Wherever he went, Lee would show up well-dressed and smiling, usually sporting a spotless pair of Air Jordan 5s, his favorite sneaker. As an aspiring rapper, he kept his finger on the pulse of music and fashion trends.

"A lot of these kids, their souls are like vacant buildings," said Terry "Uncle T" Williams, who founded a youth mentorship program in east Baltimore after his son was killed. "Antonio was really ambitious. He had a big heart. He stood out like a sore thumb for this reason."

Lee's optimism was contagious. He was curious and open-minded. He wanted to make his community proud.

"He was just so young," said Brandon Taylor, a Baltimore attorney who represented Lee. "I feel like Mr. Lee was a damn baby."

At the same time, he was forced to grow up fast, especially after his older brother was killed in 2019. Lee was grappling with a question facing many of Taylor's clients: Was it worth carrying a gun for protection despite the risk of getting stopped by police?

"But fighting and violence, that's not what Mr. Lee was all about," Taylor said. "So when I heard about him dying, that kind of crushed this whole firm."

Just weeks before his death, Lee met with Taylor about a recent arrest for fleeing police and traffic

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violations. Taylor shook his head, recalling how Lee sped home and climbed through a window instead of complying with the traffic stop.

After the shooting, loved ones were similarly left wondering what was going through Lee's mind when he decided to wash windshields in northeast Baltimore, an area he normally avoided because of ongoing neighborhood beef. He was squeegeeing with a friend that afternoon.

Baltimore's squeegee workers have long been a fixture at some of the city's busiest intersections. Mostly young Black men from east and west Baltimore, they're typically desperate for cash. But their numbers have been dwindling since a 2022 initiative from the mayor's office sought to discourage the practice and banned panhandling in certain locations.

Lee must have needed supplemental income and decided to take a chance, loved ones said. It was a mistake he couldn't afford to make.

While Lee's death added to already devastating statistics, Moore is living proof of what happens when the pendulum swings the other way.

Moore grew up in the same forgotten neighborhood and struggling school system. He basically stopped going to class junior year, but he still graduated from high school thanks to a grade-changing scheme that was later detailed in a state inspector general's report and led to districtwide policy changes.

As a teen, he spent most days gambling and selling weed, occasionally dodging gunfire. He was making decent money in the streets. And despite the near constant threat of getting shot or arrested, it was a familiar environment, a known quantity, a source of instant gratification.

But ultimately, the risks seemed to outweigh the rewards. Moore tried to envision a positive future for himself and started hanging around people who seemed like good role models.

He got a job at Chipotle, where he learned how to operate in a corporate setting and talk to customers. One day, he struck up a conversation with a man who worked in Baltimore's wholesale real estate market.

"Hit me up when you're ready to make real money," Moore remembers the man telling him. So he did.

Moore quit Chipotle after about a year. By then, he was supporting himself as a property wholesaler, coordinating deals between buyers and sellers. It was a lucrative trade that required no professional license or college degree. Moore said his most important asset was his knowledge of Baltimore's neighborhoods, crime trends, local politics and other factors that could inform investment decisions. The city's glut of vacant rowhouses provided ample opportunities.

Meanwhile, Moore also began developing relationships with advocates and business leaders focused on improving conditions for teens and young adults living in poverty.

Moore said those interactions made him realize the value of his perspective — not in spite of where he came from, but because of it. He launched a consulting firm in 2021.

As a marketing consultant, he advises businesses and nonprofits on how to connect with a Gen Z audience. His current client list includes YouTube and the national anti-violence organization Everytown for Gun Safety.

Last year, Moore organized a collaboration between Everytown and three local Baltimore streetwear designers. During a recent visit to his childhood neighborhood, he caught up with old friends and handed out shirts emblazoned with the organization's message: "STOP GUN VIOLENCE"

Moore was able to make it out of the streets, but he can't escape the social media posts perpetuating Baltimore's intractable cycles of youth violence. Some nights, he lies awake wondering how to stop them, grappling with complex questions that criminologists, public health experts and politicians have repeatedly failed to answer.

"It's so easy to self-sabotage yourself in the city. It's easy to stunt your own growth because that's what the environment breeds," he said. "You have to see a future and want it more — really want it."

It was an uphill battle as Moore pushed himself to embrace the unknown. Aside from a few lucky breaks, he attributes his success to an inquisitive mind, strong social skills, discipline and drive. Those qualities may have served him well, but they're not particularly unique.

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"The thing is, there are so many more kids like me," he said.

One of them was Lee, who considered Moore a role model of sorts. The pair developed a close friendship based on shared experiences and similar goals. In between watching sports, listening to music and going shopping, they talked about Lee's future: how he dreamed of finding a lucrative career and buying his mom a house. Moore offered advice and support. He thought Lee was next in line for success.

Moore was visiting Chicago when he heard about the shooting. He rushed back to Baltimore, unable to shake the feeling that somehow he'd failed his little brother.

"I'm so mad he got killed because kids younger than him would have been influenced and inspired by him, too," Moore said. "It possibly could have helped change a whole generation."

A week after Lee's death, family members organized an evening vigil in the heart of east Baltimore. Against a backdrop of abandoned brick rowhouses, they constructed a makeshift memorial with photographs from his childhood. They decorated nearby stoops with bunches of blue balloons and spelled "TONE" with cardboard letters fastened to a boarded-up window.

The crowd grew to around 100 people, filling the sidewalks and spilling into the street as Baltimore police officers watched from a distance. Mourners sipped from liquor bottles and lit candles while hip-hop music blasted in the background. They laughed and cried together, carrying out a series of rituals that have become all too familiar in Baltimore's most underserved communities.

Moore walked to a corner store and bought candy for some of the younger kids. He visited with a friend who had recently come home from jail. He hugged Lee's mom while she sobbed for several minutes.

Instead of inspiring others, Lee's story had become a cautionary tale.

"Right now, this city is known for its pain," said John Young, a local pastor who mentored Lee and officiated his funeral service. "The future leaders of this world are being eliminated."

During the funeral, Young asked how many people in attendance had experienced similar tragedies before. Dozens raised their hands.

He used the moment to send a clear message to Lee's peers, other young men on the brink of adulthood, caught somewhere between forgiveness and revenge, ambition and resignation.

"I want y'all to make a decision. Think about Tone and how you're gonna remember him," Young said. "How many of y'all don't want to look in a casket and see yourself in it? Aren't you tired of watching other people's mothers cry?"

"Tone wanted to change and he had the courage to admit it. ... Now it's your turn to do something for him — live."

Moore, for his part, tries to live by example.

He remains immersed in the community that raised him, even when it feels like he's straddling two worlds. He understands both sides of the equation, the challenges and the possibilities.

"Where we come from, we're so lost, we're not thinking our life matters," he said. "But there's a place for us out there. We don't have to stay outcasts just because we were born into this."

His insight comes from personal experience, but to many other young people growing up under similar circumstances, his accomplishments seem like an impossible pipe dream. Moore searches desperately for the words that will finally make them realize their untapped potential.

In a world where the future is anything but guaranteed, how do you inspire hope?

It's a piece of advice he gave Lee countless times: "You are valuable," he tells anyone who will listen. "You really gotta stay alive long enough to catch on."

New Liberia forest boss plans to increase exports, denies working with war criminal Charles Taylor

By ED DAVEY Associated Press

Liberia, West Africa's most forested country, has a long history of illegal logging, which the country's regulator, the Forestry Development Authority, has repeatedly struggled to confront.

So it raised eyebrows when Rudolph Merab, whose companies were twice found to have engaged in illegal logging, was recently appointed to lead the FDA. One of Merab's companies was also mentioned in the trial of Charles Taylor, a former Liberia president who was convicted of war crimes during the civil war in neighboring country Sierra Leone.

In an interview with The Associated Press, for the first time Merab answered questions about his past and detailed his plans for managing Liberia's forests, promising to increase timber exports and cut regulations. "Commercial logging has always helped the country," said Merab, interviewed by phone in late April, adding that more sawmills were needed so freshly cut trees could be processed within Liberia before being exported.

Liberia, a country of more than 5 million people, is bordered by Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast, and has a long coastline along the Atlantic Ocean. Despite a recent past that includes civil war and chronic problems with illegal logging, much of its tropical forests remain lush and intact.

Merab implied that twice as many trees could be felled compared to Liberia's previous peak without endangering its rainforests, which are home to West African chimpanzees and endangered forest elephants. The highest previous annual timber exports from Liberia were 1.4 million cubic meters (1.83 cubic yards), he said, whereas 3 million cubic meters (3.92 million cubic yards) would be sustainable. That would be the equivalent of about 1,200 Olympic-sized swimming pools filled with wood.

Last year, the AP revealed \$3 million of timber had been illegally logged under the FDA's then managing director Mike Doryen. He presided over a shadow system for illegal log exports in which up to 70% of timber was exported off-the-books, a dossier compiled by the U.K. Foreign Office said. Doryen has denied wrongdoing.

The United Kingdom and European Union, both major donors to Liberian forest conservation, hoped a change in government would bring about a new era. Ex-president and former footballer George Weah, who appointed Doryen and refused to sack him despite sustained diplomatic pressure, was voted out of office last year. That meant a new boss of the FDA.

President Joseph Boakai's February appointment of Merab has been met with criticism by environmentalists. Requests to the president's office seeking comment on Merab's appointment were not answered.

"Fifteen years ago, there was real hope that a newly reformed Liberian forest sector could become a shining example of how to manage tropical forests legally and sustainably," said Sam Lawson, founding director of nonprofit Earthsight and a timber expert who trained new FDA staff when the organization was reformed in the 2000s. "This latest news is the nail in the coffin of those hopes."

As president a trade group, the Liberia Timber Association, Merab strongly criticized a \$150 million deal between Liberia and Norway that aimed to protect remaining forests. He argued it threatened the logging industry and said he would leave "no stone unturned" in challenging it.

A logger since the 1980s, one of Merab's companies, Liberia Wood Management Corporation, came up in the trial of Taylor, convicted for aiding rebels during Sierra Leone's civil war. Taylor's activities were part-funded through the sale of what was dubbed "blood timber."

While being tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity, Taylor was accused by prosecutors of channeling support through LWMC to the rebels, something the former president denied. A 2001 U.N. report said LWMC was attacked by opposing rebels "to discourage them from doing business with Charles Taylor."

Merab told the AP that he had "engaged" with the Taylor but gave no details. LWMC did business with the Republic of Liberia, not with Taylor, Merab said.

"I never engaged in arms trafficking. I was one of those who was affected by this," said Merab. "We never participated in the war, we never supported any members of the war."

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Merab also took issue with determinations by previous governments that his companies had been involved in illegal logging. In 2005, a Liberia government review found LWMC's sizable logging concessions were illegal. The company's contract didn't comply with the rule of law or labor laws and had tax arrears of \$1.4 million, the review found. The company's concessions were subsequently canceled.

The findings were "completely incorrect," said Merab. "From the time I started logging, I worked within the confines of the law."

Merab said there was no court judgement finding illegality, but rather an executive order from then President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf made without proof. Merab said some taxes were owed but it was a smaller amount than alleged.

In 2012, a scandal hit another of Merab's companies, Bodeco. A government investigation found its contract had "many inconsistencies" and was "void for illegality." Bodeco had more than 90,000 hectares (347 square miles) worth of logging permits revoked.

The company "knew or should have known that they were executing a contract with material falsehoods," the review found.

Merab said that Bodeco's concessions were awarded by the government, which then backtracked, and due process was not followed in cancelling them.

"If the government of Liberia gives something," he said, "and later on because they felt under pressure they said 'No, (they) were illegal,' who's at fault?"

As forest chief, Merab said he would work to scale back regulations.

"Sometimes regulations become too cumbersome and it stifles productivity," he said. "Same thing with laws. Sometimes the law becomes very repressive."

On D-Day, 19-year-old medic Charles Shay was ready to give his life, and save as many as he could

By JEFFREY SCHAEFFER and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press
BRETTEVILLE-L'ORGUEILLEUSE, France (AP) — On D-Day, Charles Shay was a 19-year-old U.S. Army medic who was ready to give his life — and save as many as he could.

Now 99, he's spreading a message of peace with tireless dedication as he's about to take part in the 80th anniversary commemorations of the landings in Normandy that led to the liberation of France and Europe from Nazi Germany occupation.

"I guess I was prepared to give my life if I had to. Fortunately, I did not have to," Shay said in an interview with The Associated Press.

A Penobscot tribe citizen from Indian Island in the U.S. state of Maine, Shay has been living in France since 2018, not far from the shores of Normandy where many world leaders are expected to come next month. Solemn ceremonies will be honoring the nearly 160,000 troops from Britain, the U.S., Canada and other nations who landed on June 6, 1944.

Nothing could have prepared Shay for what happened that morning on Omaha Beach: bleeding soldiers, body parts and corpses strewn around him, machine-gun fire and shells filling the air.

"I had been given a job, and the way I looked at it, it was up to me to complete my job," he recalled. "I did not have time to worry about my situation of being there and perhaps losing my life. There was no time for this."

Shay was awarded the Silver Star for repeatedly plunging into the sea and carrying critically wounded soldiers to relative safety, saving them from drowning. He also received France's highest award, the Legion of Honor, in 2007.

Still, Shay could not save his good friend, Pvt. Edward Morozewicz. The sad memory remains vivid in his mind as he describes seeing his 22-year-old comrade lying on the beach with a serious stomach wound.

"He had a wound that I could not help him with because I did not have the proper instruments ... He was bleeding to death. And I knew that he was dying. I tried to comfort him. And I tried to do what I could for him, but there was no help," he said. "And while I was treating him, he died in my arms."

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"I lost many close friends," he added.

A total of 4,414 Allied troops were killed on D-Day itself, including 2,501 Americans. More than 5,000 were wounded.

Shay survived. At night, exhausted, he eventually fell asleep in a grove above the beach.

"When I woke up in the morning. It was like I was sleeping in a graveyard because there were dead Americans and Germans surrounding me," he recalled. "I stayed there for not very long and I continued on my way."

Shay then pursued his mission in Normandy for several weeks, rescuing those wounded, before heading with American troops to eastern France and Germany, where he was taken prisoner in March 1945 and liberated a few weeks later.

After World War II, Shay reenlisted in the military because the situation of Native Americans in his home state of Maine was too precarious due to poverty and discrimination.

"I tried to cope with the situation of not having enough work or not being able to help support my mother and father. Well, there was just no chance for young American Indian boys to gain proper labor and earn a good job," he said.

Maine would not allow individuals living on Native American reservations to vote until 1954.

Shay continued to witness history — returning to combat as a medic during the Korean War, participating in U.S. nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands and later working at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, Austria.

For over 60 years, he did not talk about his WWII experience.

But he began attending D-Day commemorations in 2007 and in recent years, he has seized many occasions to give his powerful testimony. A book about his life, "Spirits are guiding" by author Marie-Pascale Legrand, is about to be released this month.

In 2018, he moved from Maine to Bretteville-l'Orgueilleuse, a French small town in the Normandy region to stay at a friend's home.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21, coming from his nearby home, he was among the few veterans able to attend commemorations. He stood up for all others who could not make the trip amid restrictions.

Shay also used to lead a Native American ritual each year on D-Day, burning sage in homage to those who died. In 2022, he handed over the remembrance task to another Native American, Julia Kelly, a Gulf War veteran from the Crow tribe, who since has performed the ritual in his presence.

The Charles Shay Memorial on Omaha Beach pays tribute to the 175 Native Americans who landed there on D-Day.

Often, Shay expressed his sadness at seeing wars still waging in the world and what he considers the senseless loss of lives.

Shay said he had hoped D-Day would bring global peace. "But it has not, because you see that we go from one war to the next. There will always be wars. People and nations cannot get along with each other."

What are tactical nuclear weapons and why did Russia order drills?

By The Associated Press undefined

Russia's Defense Ministry said Monday that the military would hold drills involving tactical nuclear weapons — the first time such an exercise has been publicly announced by Moscow.

A look at tactical nuclear weapons and the part they play in the Kremlin's political messaging.

WHAT ARE TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

Unlike nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles that can destroy entire cities, tactical nuclear weapons for use against troops on the battlefield are less powerful and can have a yield as small as about 1 kiloton. The U.S. bomb dropped on Hiroshima during World War II was 15 kilotons.

Such battlefield nuclear weapons — aerial bombs, warheads for short-range missiles or artillery munitions — can be very compact. Their small size allows them to be discreetly carried on a truck or plane.

Unlike strategic weapons, which have been subject to arms control agreements between Moscow and

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Washington, tactical weapons never have been limited by any such pacts, and Russia hasn't released their numbers or any other specifics related to them.

WHAT HAS PUTIN SAID ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

Since launching the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly reminded Western nations about Moscow's nuclear might in a bid to discourage them from increasing military support to Kyiv.

Early on in the war, Putin frequently referenced Moscow's nuclear arsenal by vowing repeatedly to use "all means" necessary to protect Russia. But he later toned down his statements as Ukraine's offensive last summer failed to reach its goals and Russia scored more gains on the battlefield.

Moscow's defense doctrine envisages a nuclear response to an atomic strike or even an attack with conventional weapons that "threaten the very existence of the Russian state." That vague wording has led some pro-Kremlin Russian experts to urge Putin to sharpen it to force the West to take the warnings more seriously.

Putin said last fall that he sees no reason for such a change.

"There is no situation in which anything would threaten Russian statehood and the existence of the Russian state," he said. "I think that no person of sober mind and clear memory could have an idea to use nuclear weapons against Russia."

WHY DID RUSSIA SEND NUCLEAR WEAPONS TO BELARUS?

Last year, Russia moved some of its tactical nuclear weapons into the territory of Belarus, an ally that neighbors Ukraine and NATO members Poland, Latvia and Lithuania.

Belarus' authoritarian president, Alexander Lukashenko, had long urged Moscow to station nuclear weapons in his country, which has close military ties with Russia and served as a staging ground for the war in Ukraine.

Both Putin and Lukashenko said that nuclear weapons deployment to Belarus was intended to counter perceived Western threats. Last year, Putin specifically linked the move to the U.K. government's decision to provide Ukraine with armor-piercing shells containing depleted uranium.

Neither leader said how many were moved — only that Soviet-era facilities in the country were readied to accommodate them, and that Belarusian pilots and missile crews were trained to use them. The weapons have remained under Russian military control.

The deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus, which has a 1,084-kilometer (673-mile) border with Ukraine, would allow Russian aircraft and missiles to reach potential targets there more easily and quickly, if Moscow decides to use them. It has also extended Russia's capability to target several NATO allies in Eastern and Central Europe.

Today in History: May 7, Nazi Germany surrenders

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, May 7, the 128th day of 2024. There are 238 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 7, 1945, Nazi Germany signed an unconditional surrender at Allied headquarters in Rheims (rams), France, ending its role in World War II.

On this date:

In 1889, the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore opened its doors.

In 1915, a German U-boat torpedoed and sank the British liner RMS Lusitania off the southern coast of Ireland, killing 1,198 people, including 128 Americans, out of the nearly 2,000 on board.

In 1928, the minimum voting age for British women was lowered from 30 to 21 — the same age as men.

In 1939, Germany and Italy announced a military and political alliance known as the Rome-Berlin Axis.

In 1941, Glenn Miller and His Orchestra recorded "Chattanooga Choo Choo" for RCA Victor.

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In 1954, the 55-day Battle of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam ended with Vietnamese insurgents overrunning French forces.

In 1963, the United States launched the Telstar 2 communications satellite.

In 1975, President Gerald R. Ford formally declared an end to the "Vietnam era." In Ho Chi Minh City — formerly Saigon — the Viet Cong celebrated its takeover.

In 1977, Seattle Slew won the Kentucky Derby, the first of his Triple Crown victories.

In 2010, a BP-chartered vessel lowered a 100-ton concrete-and-steel vault onto the ruptured Deepwater Horizon well in an unprecedented, and ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to stop most of the gushing crude fouling the sea.

In 2012, Vladimir Putin took the oath of office as Russia's president for the next six years in a brief but regal Kremlin ceremony.

In 2013, movie special effects wizard Ray Harryhausen died in London at age 92.

In 2020, Georgia authorities arrested a white father and son and charged them with murder in the February shooting death of Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man they had pursued in a truck after spotting him running in their neighborhood near the port city of Brunswick. (The two men and a third white man would be convicted of murder in state court, and hate crimes in federal court.)

In 2022, Russian forces fired cruise missiles at the southern Ukrainian city of Odesa and bombarded a steel mill in Mariupol housing Ukrainian civilians and fighters, hoping to complete their conquest of the port city in time for Victory Day celebrations.

In 2023, Vida Blue, a hard-throwing left-hander who became one of baseball's biggest draws in the early 1970s and helped lead the Oakland A's to three straight World Series titles before his career was derailed by drug problems, died at age 73.

Today's Birthdays: R&B singer Thelma Houston is 81. Actor Robin Strasser is 79. Singer-songwriter Bill Danoff is 78. Rock musician Bill Kreutzmann (Grateful Dead) is 78. Former Utah Gov. Gary Herbert is 77. Rock musician Prairie Prince is 74. Movie writer-director Amy Heckerling is 72. Actor Michael E. Knight is 65. Rock musician Phil Campbell (Motorhead) is 63. Actor Traci Lords is 56. Actor Morocco Omari is 54. Singer Eagle-Eye Cherry is 53. Actor Breckin Meyer is 50. Rock musician Matt Helders (Arctic Monkeys) is 38. Actor-comedian Aidy Bryant is 37. Actor Taylor Abrahamse is 33. Actor Alexander Ludwig is 32. Actor Dylan Gelula is 30.