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Thursday, May 9

Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, creamed peas, frosted brownies, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Pop tarts.

School Lunch: Pizza, peas.

Northeast Conference Track at Sisseton, 11 a.m.

Images of the World at Groton Elementary, 1 p.m.

Groton Lions Club Meeting, 104 N Main, 6 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran Vacation Bible School, 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.; Ascension Worship, 7 p.m.



Friday, May 10

Chicken pasta salad, grape juice, dinner roll apple crisp, carrots and peas.

School Breakfast: Egg wraps.

School Lunch: Hot dogs chips.

Elementary Track and Field Day, Groton, 12:30 p.m.

Saturday, May 11

Common Cents Community Thrift Store hours 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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

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

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

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President Joe Biden yesterday said if Israel launched a full-scale invasion of Rafah in Gaza, the US would stop supplying bombs and other weapons. The announcement came after the Pentagon yesterday revealed it had stalled a shipment of bombs to Israel last week, the first such delay since the start of the Israel-Hamas war. The shipment holds 3,500 munitions, divided roughly evenly between 2,000- and 500-pound bombs. The White House had called Israel's actions in Rafah this week a limited operation, falling short of the full-scale invasion it has warned against.

Microsoft will construct a \$3B AI data center in Racine, Wisconsin, company president Brad Smith announced yesterday. It's the latest billion-dollar investment in AI infrastructure as tech companies look to keep up with surging demand.

FTX said this week it has recovered enough funds to repay defrauded investors in full and provide the vast majority with interest. The failed cryptocurrency exchange platform filed its proposal late Tuesday to a federal bankruptcy court for approval.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Denver Nuggets superstar Nikola Jokić wins 2023-24 NBA Most Valuable Player award, his third MVP win in four years. Minnesota Timberwolves' Rudy Gobert wins a record-tying fourth Defensive Player of the Year award. Miss Teen USA UmaSofia Srivastava gives up title two days after Miss USA resigns.

Steve Albini, iconic rock producer and engineer who worked with Nirvana, the Pixies, and many others, dies at 61.

South by Southwest festival to expand to London in 2025. Ten countries advance to Eurovision 2024 Grand Final set for May 11.

Science & Technology

Astronomers discover the first known exoplanet similar to Earth with a substantial gas atmosphere; 55 Cancri e, roughly 41 light-years away, is too hot for organic life but may provide insight into Earth's early development.

Researchers develop modified chemical compound based on the psychedelic venom of the Colorado River toad that reduces anxiety and stress without inducing hallucinations.

Google's DeepMind announces its AlphaFold platform now allows researchers to predict protein structures when interacting with other molecules; capability, currently under restricted access, likely to help accelerate new drug discovery.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 0.0%, Dow +0.4%, Nasdaq -0.2%); Dow extends winning streak to sixth day.

Airbnb shares fall 8% in after-hours trading on weaker Q2 forecast. Robinhood shares rise over 3% in after-hours trading on better-than-expected Q1 earnings and revenue. Uber shares close down 5%, Lyft shares close up 7% following ride-share companies' respective earnings reports a day earlier.

Archegos Capital founder Bill Hwang and company's chief financial officer begin trial for fraud and racketeering charges over an alleged stock manipulation scheme; Archegos Capital collapsed in 2021 with \$36B in assets, drove \$10B in losses at global banks.

Politics & World Affairs

House Democrats join Republicans in 359-43 vote to dismiss motion from Rep. Marjorie Taylor-Greene (R, GA-14) to oust House Speaker Mike Johnson (R, LA-4).

Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has suffered from a series of health issues, including a parasite that infected part of his brain, as well as a neurological disorder, heartbeat abnormality, and mercury poisoning, per new report.

Russia launches more than 70 missile and attack drones targeting Ukrainian power plants across six region.

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—Weber—
Landscaping
Greenhouse

NOW
OPEN!

620 West Third Avenue
Groton
Hours: M-F 10-6
Sat 10-4 ~ Sun 12-4

Spink County Fatality

What: Two vehicle fatal crash
Where: SD Highway 20, mile marker 350, 9 miles southwest of Conde, SD
When: 4:48 p.m., Tuesday, May 7, 2024

Driver 1: Male, 77, fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2021 CanAm Defender UTV
Seat Belt Use: No

Driver 2: Male, 60, no injuries
Vehicle 2: 1996 Peterbilt Conventional 379
Seat Belt Use: Yes

Spink County, S.D.- A 77-year-old man died Tuesday afternoon in a two-vehicle crash nine miles south west of Conde, SD.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2021 CanAm Defender UTV turned in front of a westbound Peterbilt truck on SD Highway 20. The truck struck the UTV, forcing it into the ditch where it rolled. The driver of the UTV died from his injuries.

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

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



Dairy Queen in Groton is hiring! If you're looking for a fun job with lots of variety, look no further! We're looking for energetic, smiling people – we provide free meals, uniforms, competitive wages, fun atmosphere and flexible scheduling. Part-time – day, evening, week-end shifts available. We will work with your schedule. Stop in today and pick up an application.

Secretary of State Provides Information Regarding Absentee Voting and Trusted Sources for Election Information

(Pierre, S.D.) – Ahead of South Dakota’s Primary Election which will be held on Tuesday, June 4, 2024, Secretary Monae L Johnson urges voters to confirm the sources of election information they are receiving. The secretary’s office is encouraging South Dakotans to look to the South Dakota Secretary of State’s office and county auditors for trusted election information.

Absentee voting is already taking place in county auditor’s offices across the state. For those who intend to vote absentee, the deadline to request a ballot is 5:00 pm local time on Monday, June 3, 2024. You may also drop off your absentee ballot in-person at your county auditor’s office.

All absentee ballots must be delivered to the county auditors by the time that polls close on election day in order to be counted. Remember to allow for adequate mail processing time when returning your absentee ballot to your county auditor’s office by mail. If an absentee ballot is received after that time, it may not be opened or counted, regardless of when it was mailed.

Voters may verify their voter registration information, polling place location, whether they have already requested an absentee ballot, and check the status of their absentee ballot by contacting their county auditor or searching the Voter Information Portal (VIP) on the Secretary of State’s website: <https://vip.sdsos.gov/VIPLLogin.aspx>. More information on absentee voting can be found at <https://sdsos.gov/elections-voting/voting/absentee-voting.aspx>.

Secretary Johnson and the county auditors stand united in ensuring that elections are conducted transparently and securely in South Dakota. South Dakotans can be assured elections in the state are some of the safest and most secure in the country. The South Dakota Secretary of State’s Office, along with local election officials, are continuously working to inform Americans about the elections process, including voter registration, state election laws, polling place locations, post-election processes and much more.

Working to Protect & Promote Traditional American Values

- ✓ Pro Police
- ✓ Pro Constitution
- ✓ Pro Family



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STATE REPRESENTATIVE

DISTRICT 1

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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 Area Tigers Varsity Raly Defeats Redfield Area Muskrats

Groton Area Tigers Varsity trailed by as many as four, but came back to best Redfield Area Muskrats on Wednesday, 8-4.

Redfield Area Muskrats opened the scoring in the first after Elijah Morrissette doubled, scoring two runs.

A double by Morrissette extended the Redfield Area Muskrats lead to 4-0 in the top of the second inning.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity tied the game in the bottom of the second thanks to a single by Braxton Imrie, a walk by Dillon Abeln, and a single by Bradin Althoff.

In the bottom of the sixth, Groton Area Tigers Varsity broke up the tie when Colby Dunker tripled, scoring three runs. Then a ground out by Logan Ringgenberg followed to extend the lead to 8-4.

Abeln led things off on the bump for Groton Area Tigers Varsity. The right-handed pitcher surrendered six hits and four runs (two earned) over five innings, striking out seven and walking four. Kevin Weller led things off on the mound for Redfield Area Muskrats. The starting pitcher allowed nine hits and eight runs over six innings, striking out none and walking seven. Jarrett Erdmann tossed two innings of zero-run ball for Groton Area Tigers Varsity in relief.

The reliever allowed zero hits, striking out six and walking three.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity collected nine hits in the game. Dunker drove the middle of the lineup, leading Groton Area Tigers Varsity with three runs batted in. The left fielder went 1-for-3 on the day. Number nine hitter, Imrie, showed the depth of Groton Area Tigers Varsity's lineup, by leading them with three hits in three at bats. Althoff collected two hits for Groton Area Tigers Varsity in three at bats. Karsten Flieds paced Groton Area Tigers

Varsity with two walks. Overall, the team had patience at the plate, amassing seven walks for the game.

Morrissette drove the middle of the lineup, leading Redfield Area Muskrats with four runs batted in. The right-handed hitter went 3-for-3 on the day. Redfield Area Muskrats had patience at the plate, amassing seven walks for the game. Weller, Conner Zens, and Hunter Binger led the team with two free passes each.

Redfield Area Muskrats turned one double play in the game.

Groton American Legion
Olive Grove Golf Course



\$5 for 1 ticket
\$20 for 5 tickets!

Deadline is 5:30 p.m. Thursdays

Queen of Hearts is today

The jackpot is over \$14,000. If you want to buy a ticket, you can venmo me: paperpaul (last four of phone number is 7460).

The following numbers have been used:

- 3
- 4
- 19
- 20
- 22
- 41 Rick Schelle
- 47 Brooks Kleffman
- 40 Dennis & Shirley Larson
- 45 Joel Bierman

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Redfield Area Muskrats 4 - 8 Groton Area Tigers Varsity

📍 Home 📅 Wednesday May 08, 2024

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
RDFL	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	4	6	1
GRTN	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	8	9	2

BATTING

Redfield Area Muskrats	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
C Zens (3B)	2	1	0	0	2	1
K Weller (P)	2	1	0	0	2	0
E Morrissette (C)	3	0	3	4	0	0
M Zastrow (1B)	4	0	1	0	0	1
E Falls	4	0	1	0	0	3
D Murray (RF)	4	0	0	0	0	4
H Binger (CF)	2	1	1	0	2	0
J Rude (2B)	3	1	0	0	1	2
C Odland (SS)	4	0	0	0	0	2
CR: J Ethridge	0	0	0	0	0	0
CR: #8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	28	4	6	4	7	13

2B: E Morrissette 2, **TB:** H Binger, E Falls, E Morrissette 5, M Zastrow, **HBP:** E Morrissette, **LOB:** 11

PITCHING

Redfield Area Muskrats	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
K Weller	6.0	9	8	8	7	0	0
Totals	6.0	9	8	8	7	0	0

L: K Weller 2, **P-S:** K Weller 102-52, **BF:** K Weller 33

Groton Area Tigers	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
B Flihs (SS)	3	2	1	0	1	0
D Abeln (P, RF)	3	1	1	1	1	0
B Althoff (1B)	3	1	2	2	1	0
C Dunker (LF)	3	1	1	3	1	0
L Ringgenberg (CF)	4	1	1	1	0	0
G Englund (3B)	2	0	0	0	1	0
J Erdmann (P)	1	0	0	0	0	0
C Simon (RF, 3B)	3	0	0	0	0	0
K Flihs (C)	1	0	0	0	2	0
B Imrie (2B)	3	1	3	1	0	0
CR: L Krause	0	1	0	0	0	0
Totals	26	8	9	8	7	0

3B: C Dunker, **TB:** C Dunker 3, B Althoff 2, B Imrie 3, B Flihs, D Abeln, L Ringgenberg, **SB:** B Flihs, **LOB:** 7

Groton Area Tigers	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
D Abeln	5.0	6	4	2	4	7	0
J Erdmann	2.0	0	0	0	3	6	0
Totals	7.0	6	4	2	7	13	0

W: J Erdmann 2, **P-S:** D Abeln 106-68, J Erdmann 46-26, **WP:** J Erdmann, **HBP:** J Erdmann, **BF:** D Abeln 26, J Erdmann 10



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Noem's former opponents reject her claim that dog-killing story was widely known and used

As book fallout continues, Democrats call for governor's spokesman to resign and fifth tribe bans Noem from reservation

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 8, 2024 4:30 PM

During a series of contentious recent interviews, Gov. Kristi Noem repeatedly said a story in her new book about fatally shooting a dog was already widely known in South Dakota because her political opponents had used it against her.

Yet when South Dakota Searchlight contacted Noem's former opponents, most of those who answered the phone or returned a message said they'd never heard the story before Noem put it in her own book. Others said they had previously heard rumors about the story but never used it in a campaign or ever saw anyone else use it.

The last person to run a competitive race against Noem was Billie Sutton, the Democratic nominee for governor in 2018 who lost by three percentage points.

When told of Noem's comments, Sutton said "that's just not true," adding that he'd never heard the dog story before she included it in her book.

Noem has been on a book tour since last weekend, giving interviews to the national media and encountering difficult questions even from Republican-leaning outlets. She's been a subject of national ridicule and scorn for revealing in the book that she fatally shot a dog and a goat, and for apparently fabricating a claim that she met North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un. The book is titled "No Going Back."

As interviewers have asked about the dog story, Noem has often said she included it to set the record straight after the story was used against her in her home state.

"Everybody's known that story for years," Noem told Fox News. "That's what most people don't realize — that in South Dakota, they've used that story to attack me and my political campaigns for years. I wanted people to know the truth."

The governor made similar comments to Newsmax.

"I think that in South Dakota, in the last couple of elections that I've had, my political opponents have tried to use this story, and tried to use it against me," she said. "I wanted people to know the truth, and that's why it's in the book."

Jamie Smith, a Democrat, lost to Noem in the 2022 general election. He had heard rumors about Noem shooting a dog, he said, "but our campaign chose to stay focused on the issues."

"It doesn't surprise me that she's not telling the truth and that she thought it was a good idea to tell others about her cruelty," he said. "This is the Kristi Noem we have known in South Dakota for a long time."

The Libertarian candidate in the 2022 race for governor, Tracey Quint, said of the dog story, "No, I had not heard it before the book."

Noem's most recent Republican primary opponent, Steven Haugaard, who lost to her in 2022, said the same thing.

"I don't know what she's talking about," Haugaard said. "It's certainly not well thought-out."

Marty Jackley, the current South Dakota attorney general, lost to Noem in the 2018 Republican gubernatorial primary. When asked if he had ever previously heard the dog story, he answered with one word: "No."

Public Utilities Commissioner Chris Nelson ran against Noem in a 2010 Republican U.S. House primary, which she won on her way to serving eight years in Congress before becoming governor. Nelson said he

had not heard the dog story previously.

South Dakota Searchlight asked the governor's spokesperson, Ian Fury, to explain why Noem is claiming the dog story was widely known and used against her.

Fury responded in an email with a link to a CNN interview featuring Democratic state Sen. Reynold Nesiba, D-Sioux Falls, in which Nesiba said, "This is a rumor that's been around for years about her acting in anger to put down a dog."

Nesiba told Searchlight, "I'd never heard of anyone using it against her." He thinks Noem was attempting to get ahead of the story by putting it in her book, rather than allowing the media to uncover it as she sought to be chosen as Donald Trump's running mate in this year's presidential race.

Searchlight asked Fury if that was the rationale. He did not reply.

Meanwhile, the state Democratic Party issued a news release Wednesday calling for Fury's resignation due to what the party described as his failure to provide effective communications for Noem during the preparation of her book and the ensuing fallout.

Party Chair Shane Merrill and Vice Chair Jessica Meyers said in a joint statement, "Public service is an honor and a privilege. South Dakota taxpayers should not be on the hook paying Ian Fury more than \$144,000 a year salary to destroy the reputation of our state and negate the millions of dollars spent to advertise South Dakota across the country."

In other Noem news, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate this week became the fifth Native American tribe in South Dakota to ban her from a reservation due to her recent claims that tribal leaders are benefitting from Mexican cartel drug trafficking.

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.

FDA chief says feds are preparing for low probability of bird flu moving to humans

South Dakota among states where avian influenza has been detected in cattle

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MAY 8, 2024 3:16 PM

WASHINGTON — The commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration said at a congressional hearing Wednesday the agency is preparing for the possibility the strain of avian influenza affecting dairy cattle could jump to humans, though he cautioned the probability is low.

Robert Califf told senators on the panel in charge of his agency's funding that top officials from the FDA, Agriculture Department and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are speaking daily to keep a handle on the situation. He also stressed that pasteurized milk is safe.

"This virus, like all viruses, is mutating," Califf said. "We need to continue to prepare for the possibility that it might jump to humans."

Califf told senators that the "real worry is that it will jump to the human lungs where, when that has happened in other parts of the world for brief outbreaks, the mortality rate has been 25%."

That would be about 10 times worse than the death rate from COVID-19, he said.

Califf stressed the possibility is low and the CDC continues to maintain its assessment that "the current public health risk is low."

The H5N1 bird flu strain has had an impact on 36 dairy herds in Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Michigan, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, South Dakota and Texas, according to the CDC.

Two cases have been reported in people — one who had exposure to dairy cows in Texas that were "presumed to be infected" and one in Colorado "involved in the culling (depopulating) of poultry with presumptive H5N1 bird flu." Both cases were reported in April, according to the CDC.

The Texas case "reported eye redness (consistent with conjunctivitis), as their only symptom" while the Colorado case reported "fatigue for a few days as their only symptom and has since recovered," according to the CDC.

Multiple federal agencies involved

Califf told the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee during the hearing the Agriculture Department holds jurisdiction over the dairy cows, the FDA is in charge of making sure milk and other foods are safe and the CDC has the responsibility to ensure the safety of farmworkers.

The FDA has repeatedly tested milk on store shelves throughout the country and found no live virus, due to pasteurization, he said.

The agency is interested in testing milk before the pasteurization process begins, though Califf said they've had some difficulties getting access to dairy farms.

"Access to the farms, for example, is really something that has to be negotiated through the states," he said. "The farmers and the owners of dairy farms are more comfortable with people that they know that are in their state. So all this has to be coordinated."

Califf explained that when cows are milked, that "goes into bulk tanks, which is a mixture of a number of cows."

"That's a very sensitive area because it does point, if there are infected cows, as to where the infections are," Califf testified. "And technically it's no problem, but we want to make sure we have trust. And so there's negotiation that needs to go on to make sure there's a safe way to handle the data and that people are not going to be castigated if they happen to have an infected herd. So we're working through all that state by state."

Wisconsin Democratic Sen. Tammy Baldwin urged the FDA to coordinate and communicate frequently with farmers and the public.

Her home state, she noted, has more than 5,000 dairy herds, making up 22% of the nation's total herd count. "So this is a big deal for us."

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

Rounds bill would prevent mandatory electronic tags for cattle and bison

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MAY 8, 2024 10:32 AM

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, introduced legislation Wednesday that would prevent the federal government from implementing a rule requiring the use of electronic identification tags on cattle and bison.

"South Dakota cattle producers don't need D.C. bureaucrats telling them how to manage and track their livestock," Rounds said in a press release.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture issued the final rule last month and said it will be effective 180 days after publication in the Federal Register. The department said the rule would put in place "the technology, tools, and processes to help quickly pinpoint and respond to costly foreign animal diseases."

"Rapid traceability in a disease outbreak will not only limit how long farms are quarantined, keep more animals from getting sick, and help ranchers and farmers get back to selling their products more quickly – but will help keep our markets open," said Dr. Michael Watson, administrator of the department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

The department said the rule applies to "all sexually intact cattle and bison 18 months of age or older, all dairy cattle, cattle and bison of any age used for rodeo or recreation events, and cattle or bison of any age used for shows or exhibitions."

The rule requires official ear tags to be visually and electronically readable for interstate movement of

certain cattle and bison. The tags are often described as RFID, for radio frequency identification. Rounds said the rule would also require records to be entered into a tribal, state or federal database, allowing the federal government to access the information.

"USDA's proposed RFID mandate is federal government overreach, plain and simple," Rounds said, adding that if farmers and ranchers want to use electronic tags, they can do so voluntarily.

Doris Lauing, executive director of the South Dakota Stockgrowers Association, said in Rounds' press release that the federal mandate would be a "violation of constitutional personal property rights" and an "unnecessary expense."

Bill Bullard, CEO of R-CALF USA, said the mandatory ear tags "will cost the industry tens of millions of dollars without any means of recovery from the marketplace."

On second try, U.S. House approves GOP bill to ease mining on federal lands

South Dakota Republican casts vote in favor of legislation

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - MAY 8, 2024 6:22 PM

The U.S. House passed, 216-195, a bill Wednesday that would loosen a restriction on mining operations, reversing a vote last week to return the bill to committee.

South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson cast one of the votes in favor of the legislation.

The bill, written by Nevada Republican Mark Amodei, would clarify that mining companies can conduct mining support operations on federal lands, even without first documenting a known mineral deposit. It responds to a 2022 federal appeals court ruling restricting mining companies from using federal lands without a documented mineral deposit.

The Republican-controlled House rejected the bill last week, voting 210-206 to adopt a motion to recommit the measure to the House Natural Resources Committee. Six Republicans joined all Democrats present to oppose the bill.

Lawmakers did not make changes to the bill between the May 1 vote and Wednesday, but the presence Wednesday of several Republicans who were absent last week allowed the measure to pass on the second attempt.

"Why the heck are we back on the House floor one week after we voted on a bipartisan basis to send this bad bill back to committee?" New Mexico Democrat Melanie Stansbury said during floor debate Wednesday.

Stansbury called the bill a giveaway to mining companies, including those based in China and other countries.

Rep. Pete Stauber of Minnesota, who chairs the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources and led Republican floor debate Wednesday, made no mention of last week's vote, but continued to advocate for the bill as a benefit to domestic mining interests.

Encouraging U.S. mining, especially as an alternative to importing Chinese minerals, should be encouraged, he said. Domestic environmental and labor protections are stronger than they are in other countries, he said.

"I support fair labor standards, I support high environmental standards, I support increasing our national security," Stauber said. "In short, I support domestic mining."

The bill was meant to address a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that Republicans disagreed with, Stauber said.

The ruling blocked an Arizona mining project from dumping waste rock on U.S. Forest Service land. The court ruled that the mining company's claim on the Forest Service land was invalid because it had not shown a valuable mineral deposit there.

Mining interests have criticized the ruling, known as the Rosemont decision, for restricting operations

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on federal lands.

"This is a simple fix," Stauber said. "We believe the court erred, so it's our job to legislate."

China debate

Stansbury said the bill could benefit subsidiaries of foreign mining companies, including Chinese companies.

It would allow Chinese companies to control U.S. federal lands, she said.

Rep. John Moolenaar, a Michigan Republican who chairs the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, authored an amendment to the bill last month that would have banned companies or subsidiaries from adversarial nations from mining on federal lands.

The House Rules Committee declined to make that amendment in order, which New Mexico Democrat Teresa Leger Fernandez noted Wednesday.

Stauber said all companies that operate in the U.S. have to comply with labor and environmental standards.

He also responded to the claim that the bill would spur a takeover of federal lands by Chinese companies. The bill would not affect foreign mining operations in the U.S., which is already allowed under existing law.

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

SD congressman supports speaker as attempted ouster fails

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MAY 8, 2024 5:19 PM

WASHINGTON — Efforts by a small group of far-right U.S. House Republicans to remove Speaker Mike Johnson from his leadership role failed Wednesday night, ending weeks of infighting about whether the Louisianan should remain the head of that chamber.

Republican lawmakers including South Dakota's Dusty Johnson, joined by Democrats, voted 359-43 to table, or set aside, the so-called motion to vacate that Georgia GOP Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene originally filed in March, before spending weeks calling for Speaker Mike Johnson to resign.

Greene was backed by Kentucky Rep. Thomas Massie and Arizona Rep. Paul Gosar ahead of the vote, though a few more GOP lawmakers signaled their frustrations with Speaker Johnson's leadership by voting to move ahead with a vote, instead of tabling it.

Greene, reading from her lengthy motion to vacate before the vote, rejected Johnson bringing broadly bipartisan bills to the House floor during his six months as speaker.

The government funding bills, Greene said, showed that "Johnson supported fully funding abortion, the trans agenda, the climate agenda, foreign wars and Biden's border crisis, rather than ensuring liberty, opportunity and security for all Americans."

"Mike Johnson is ill-equipped to handle the rigors of the job of speaker of the House and has allowed a uniparty — one that fuels foreign wars, tramples on civil liberties and increases our disastrous national debt — to take complete control of the House of Representatives," Greene said.

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, a Louisiana Republican, moved to table Greene's motion.

Johnson, speaking to reporters in Statuary Hall, said he appreciated "the show of confidence from my colleagues to defeat this misguided effort."

"Hopefully, this is the end of the personality politics and the frivolous character assassination that has defined the 118th Congress," Johnson said. "It's regrettable. It's not who we are as Americans. And we're better than this. We need to get beyond it."

Johnson said he planned to work throughout the year to grow the Republican majority in the House and elect Donald Trump as president during November's elections.

"I'm proud to serve in this position. It's not one that I aspired to. It's not one that I ever expected to have or planned for, but it is the honor of my life and career to do this," Johnson said. "And I will do it, so long as this body will have me do that."

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House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, Democratic Whip Katherine Clark and Democratic Caucus Chair Pete Aguilar announced last week they would vote to keep Johnson in the speaker's office.

"We will vote to table Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene's Motion to Vacate the Chair," they wrote at the time. "If she invokes the motion, it will not succeed."

Greene and Massie met with Johnson for two hours on Monday and about 90 minutes on Tuesday, laying out their requirements for not offering the motion to vacate. Greene said the ball was in Johnson's court on whether to comply with the changes or not.

Big change from McCarthy vote

The vote was considerably different from the vote to remove former Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, that took place in October after Florida GOP Rep. Matt Gaetz filed another motion to vacate.

Eight Republicans and the chamber's Democrats all voted to remove McCarthy from his leadership post.

The House Republican Conference then spent weeks debating behind closed doors who should become their nominee for speaker — first selecting Scalise, who withdrew after just one day without holding a floor vote; then choosing Ohio's Jim Jordan, who took his bid to the floor for a series of failed votes; and then Minnesota Rep. Tom Emmer, who withdrew after just hours as the nominee.

House Republicans then voted to nominate Johnson, who received unanimous support from fellow GOP lawmakers during the floor vote.

Johnson held that leadership role for less than six months before Greene began calling for him to step down from the speaker's office or face a motion to vacate him from the office on the House floor.

Greene and others have become increasingly angry that Johnson has brought bipartisan bills to the floor for votes, including government funding legislation, the reauthorization of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and a \$95 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan.

Johnson's detractors argue that he should have done more to push for conservative policy wins, even though any legislation that passes the House must move through the Democratic-controlled Senate and avoid President Joe Biden's veto pen in order to become law.

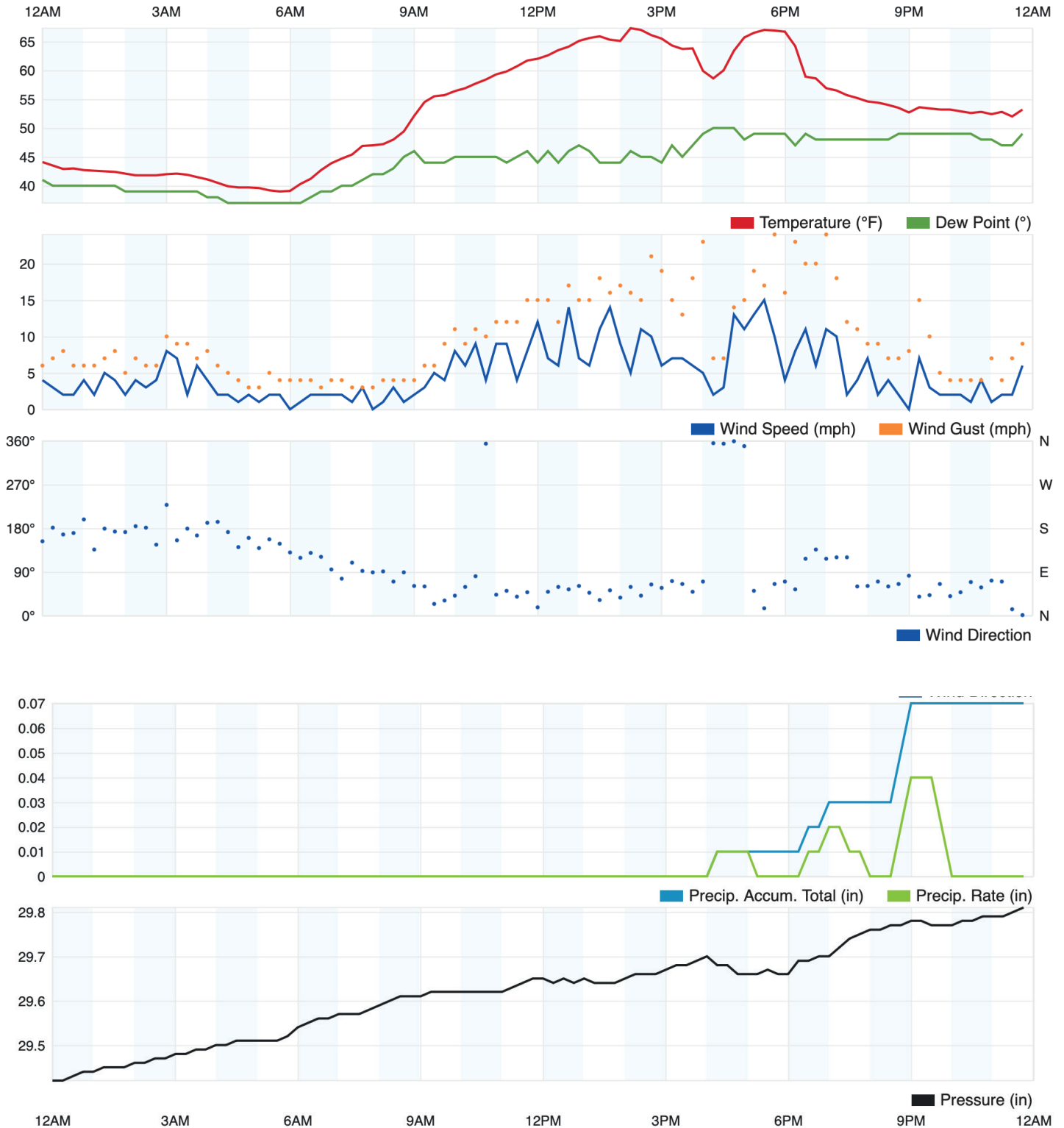
Greene has also argued that Johnson allowing broadly bipartisan legislation to pass on the House floor could risk Republican candidates' chances of winning seats during the November elections.

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 70 °F

Mostly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 48 °F

Partly Cloudy

Friday



High: 71 °F

Sunny then
Mostly Sunny
and Breezy

Friday Night



Low: 44 °F

Mostly Clear

Saturday



High: 78 °F

Mostly Sunny

THROUGH THE WEEKEND

TODAY



HIGHS: 65-71°F

LOWS: 44-49°F

FRIDAY



HIGHS: 68-72°F

LOWS: 43-47°F

SATURDAY



HIGHS: 73-80°F

LOWS: 49-56°F

SUNDAY



HIGHS: 75-81°F

LOWS: 48-51°F



May 9, 2024 3:46 AM



We've got some warmer weather coming our way to end the work week, lasting through the weekend. Temperatures will be on the rise with upper 70s to low 80s expected by Saturday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 68 °F at 2:20 PM

Low Temp: 39 °F at 5:42 AM

Wind: 25 mph at 6:48 PM

Precip: : 0.07

Day length: 14 hours, 44 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 93 in 1992

Record Low: 21 in 1966

Average High: 68

Average Low: 41

Average Precip in May.: 0.98

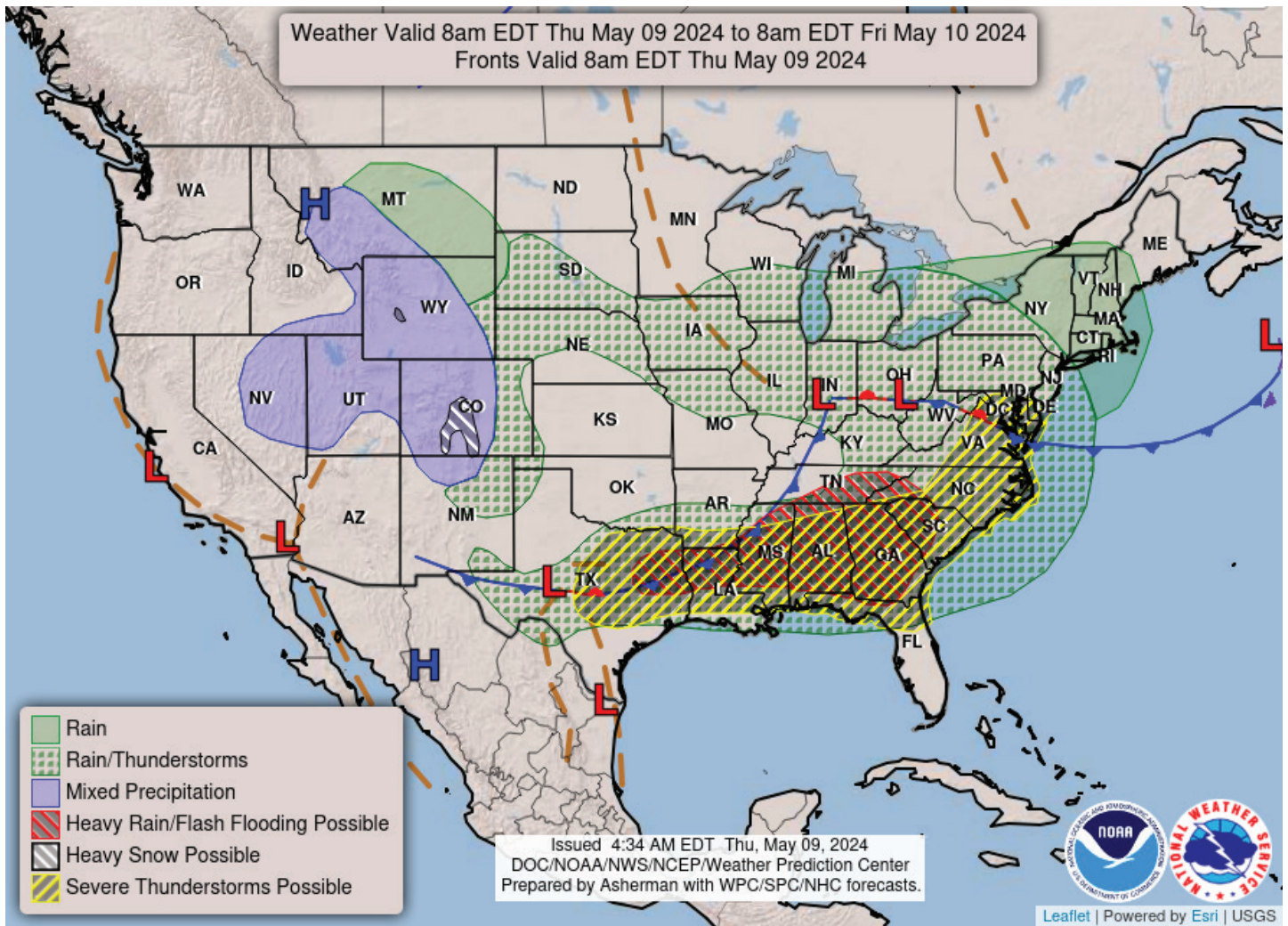
Precip to date in May: 0.68

Average Precip to date: 4.95

Precip Year to Date: 5.21

Sunset Tonight: 8:51:09 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:05:12 am



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Today in Weather History

May 9, 1999: Torrential rains of two to five inches fell in Lyman County during the late evening hours which caused flash flooding on Medicine Creek. The KOA Campgrounds near Kennebec were flooded including the main facility. Several roads were also flooded and damaged along Medicine Creek. Storm total rainfall in Kennebec was 3.40 inches. Also, a weak F0 tornado touched down briefly three miles south of Reliance with no damage reported. Winds gusting to 70 mph knocked over a 4000-bushel holding bin near Revillo.

1918: An F4 tornado moved across Floyd, Chickasaw, and Winneshiek Counties in northeast Iowa from two miles north of Pearl Rock to Calmar. Two people died east of Calmar when the tornado was a mile wide. Losses in and near Calmar totaled \$250,000. Overall, this tornado killed seven people and injured 15 others.

1933: An estimated F4 tornado moved through Monroe, Cumberland, and Russell Counties in Kentucky along a 60-mile path. The town of Tompkinsville, KY was the hardest hit with 18 people killed. Overall, 36 people lost their lives.

1966: Record snows fell in the northeastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania, including 3.1 inches at Pittsburgh and 5.4 inches at Youngstown Ohio. Snow also extended across parts of New York State with eight inches reported in the southern Adirondacks.

1977 - A late season snowstorm hit parts of Pennsylvania, New York State, and southern and central New England. Heavier snowfall totals included 27 inches at Slide Mountain NY and 20 inches at Norwalk CT. At Boston it was the first May snow in 107 years of records. The heavy wet snow caused extensive damage to trees and power lines. The homes of half a million persons were without power following the storm. (9th-10th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1985 - Lightning struck some trees about 150 yards away from a home in Alabama, and followed the driveway to the home. The charge went through the house and burned all the electrical outlets, ruined appliances, and blasted a hole in the concrete floor of the basement. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Unseasonably warm weather spread from the Pacific Northwest to the Upper Mississippi Valley. Fifteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date. It was the fourth day of record warmth for Eugene OR and Salem OR. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A massive cyclone in the central U.S. produced severe thunderstorms from eastern Texas to the Upper Ohio Valley. A strong (F-3) tornado ripped through Middleboro KY causing more than 22 million dollars damage. Thunderstorms in east central Texas produced hail three and a half inches in diameter at Groesbeck, and near Fairfield. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front in the south central U.S. produced golf ball size hail and wind gusts to 62 mph at Mira LA, and during the morning hours drenched Stuttgart AR with five inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the central U.S. during the evening hours, mainly from southeastern Missouri to southwestern Indiana. Severe thunderstorms spawned four tornadoes, including two strong (F-2) tornadoes in southern Illinois. Strong thunderstorm winds gusted to 85 mph at Orient IL, and to 100 mph at West Salem. Thunderstorms drenched northeastern Illinois with up to 4.50 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990: The 1990 Machilipatnam Cyclone was the worst disaster to affect Southern India since the 1977 Andhra Pradesh cyclone. This category four on the Saffir-Simpson scale had a severe impact on India, with over 967 people reported having been killed. Over 100,000 animals also died in the cyclone with the total cost of damages to crops estimated at over \$600 million (1990 USD).

1995: An F3 tornado produced \$10 million in damages along its 40-mile path across central Illinois. The tornado caused significant damage in Cantrall where three homes were destroyed, 10 had significant damage, and 11 had minor damage. The roof and interior of a grade school suffered extensive damage. The tornado passed about 2 miles southeast of the new NWS Office in Lincoln, Illinois.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

GOD LEADS US ALL THE DAY LONG!

It seemed that every day was a struggle for George Young. The more he did to serve the Lord the worse things got. He was the pastor of a small country church, and it was necessary for him to work as a carpenter in order to provide for the needs of his family.

For months he and his family lived in a borrowed tent while he built a small home for them. The day finally came when they moved into their new dwelling.

One night while the Youngs were worshipping together with their friends from the surrounding communities, a group of men decided to destroy their home by fire. They resented the influence that the church was having on their families. The men thought that if they destroyed their home, the Youngs would leave.

Returning from church that evening, they found their home going up in flames. The Youngs were stunned. In a state of fear and shock, they gathered together and cried to the Lord. All of their personal belongings were destroyed. But not their faith in God. It was undisturbed.

When they finished crying, George Young took a piece of paper and a pencil and wrote:
"Some through the waters, Some through the flood;
Some through the fire, But all through the blood;
Some through great sorrow, But God gives a song;
In the night season and all the day long!"

Prayer: Father, when days are difficult and painful and the hopelessness and sorrows of dark nights never seem to end, may our faith in You bring a song to our hearts. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23



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:
05.07.24

26 28 36 63 66 15

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$331,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 38
Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.08.24

5 11 18 38 47 5

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,300,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 53
Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.08.24

17 30 31 33 44 16

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 8 Mins 0
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.08.24

1 13 25 28 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$90,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 8
Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.08.24

10 22 43 55 57 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 37
Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.08.24

7 41 43 44 51 5

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$36,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 37
Mins 0 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Trump is in no hurry as he leans into the pageantry of vice presidential tryouts

By JILL COLVIN, LISA MASCARO and ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — As former President Donald Trump remains stuck in the courtroom listening to salacious details of an extramarital sexual encounter he denies, another spectacle is playing out in the background as his vice presidential tryouts get underway.

The dynamic was on full display in Florida over the weekend at a closed-door fundraiser at his Mar-a-Lago club that doubled as an audition featuring a long list of potential running mates. Trump, at one point, invited many of the contenders on stage like contestants in one of his old beauty pageants. The next day several of them, including South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and New York Rep. Elise Stefanik, fanned out across Sunday news shows to sing his praises.

"This weekend, we had 15 people. ... They're all out there campaigning," Trump told Spectrum News 1 Wisconsin on Tuesday. "It might actually be more effective this way because, you know, every one of them thinks they could be chosen, which I guess possibly is so."

The comments demonstrate why Trump is in no rush to pick his potential second-in-command or publicly winnow his choices. For now, the presumptive GOP nominee is happy to revel in the attention as reporters parse his choices and prospective candidates jockey and woo him in an "Apprentice"-style competition.

Trump has said he intends to make an announcement shortly before July's Republican National Convention, as he did when he picked then-Indiana Gov. Mike Pence in 2016.

"In the end, it's up to him. He will intuitively decide who should be his vice president, and he'll listen to everybody up until that moment and then he'll decide," said former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, one of three finalists on Trump's 2016 list.

For candidates, he said, if Trump calls and asks them to speak at a rally, "The correct answer's 'yes.'" But there are limits to their impact.

"Some of them try to audition," Gingrich said, "but I never thought it worked that well."

For now, according to several people familiar with his thinking, Trump continues to mull a long list of prospects: governors, senators and members of Congress, including some who ran against him and lost. The people spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the fundraiser and private conversations. As Trump mulls his decision, he is watching to see who can raise money, defend him effectively, and perform at political events. He's especially interested in how they come across on television.

Part of what seems to have made the decision harder is that many of the candidates under serious consideration have knocks against them.

Rubio, one potential top contender, could help Trump win over Hispanic voters as well as establishment donors still leery of a second Trump term. But Rubio has a problem: He lives in Florida, the same state as Trump, which would violate the Constitution's 12th Amendment.

Trump himself has raised the issue, including at Saturday's fundraising luncheon, where he said he liked Rubio, according to one of several people present, but noted the issue with his residency, calling it a problem.

Ohio Sen. JD Vance, a friend of Trump's eldest son who has become close with the former president, is also considered a top contender. He impressed Trump allies with a CNN interview last week.

But Trump continues to note that Vance was a critic before he became a supporter — something he mentioned again at the Saturday event before praising Vance as a great senator.

Scott, whom Trump has repeatedly joked is a far better surrogate than a candidate, also has drawbacks. Scott pushed Trump to back a 15-week national abortion ban during the GOP primaries and his selection would draw new attention to something Trump has tried to eliminate as a campaign issue by insisting it should be left to the states.

Those issues could help a candidate like Burgum, a billionaire who has traveled extensively with Trump

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since he dropped his own presidential bid.

Others have seemed to test the limits of what it takes to be disqualified.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem has faced a media storm since reports emerged that she she wrote about shooting a family dog to death in a book released this week. Noem has also been caught in errors, including falsely claiming that she once met North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un. She has continued to appear in interviews defending her actions, drawing the storyline out for days.

Trump, in his Tuesday interview, continued to praise Noem, who at one point had been considered a top contender, though he acknowledged that "she had a rough couple of days, I will say that."

Noem's star, in fact, had been tarnished before the revelation of her dog killing amid questions about her judgment, including her decision to appear in an infomercial-style video lavishing praise on a team of cosmetic dentists in Texas.

Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders, meanwhile, has also been the subject of negative headlines. A recent audit suggested that her office may have broken the law when it purchased a \$19,000 lectern — a scandal dubbed "lecterngate" by some.

Sanders, who served as Trump's press secretary at the White House, responded with Trumpian defiance, posting a 20-second video on X featuring the blue and wood-paneled lectern. The opening lyrics of Jay-Z's "Public Service Announcement" played in the background and the words "come and take it" appeared on the screen.

Sanders may still face more questions, with an audit of her travel and security records pending. But her unapologetic response reinforced her image as an acolyte of the Trump brand.

"In the Trump era, what used to be a scandal is no longer a scandal and what used to be seen as a liability is not really as much of a liability," said Kevin Madden, who was a senior adviser to former Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney. "Trump has an ability to block out the sun."

Provocative comments that could have been a liability in past election cycles could also be assets for candidates like Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton, who has urged the public to "take matters into your own hands" if they encounter pro-Palestinian protesters blocking traffic.

"Anyone claiming to know who or when President Trump will choose his VP is lying, unless the person is named Donald J. Trump," senior campaign advisor Brian Hughes said in an emailed statement.

Trump continues to maintain publicly and privately that the "most important thing" in a potential pick is whether they would be a good president if called upon — and that he doesn't think the choice is likely to change the trajectory of the race.

"VPs have never really helped in the election process," he said Tuesday. "It's a one-day story, it's a big story, and then it's back to work. They want to really know who's No. 1 on the ticket."

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. May 6, 2024.

Editorial: USPS Decision Seemed Inevitable

Ultimately and unfortunately, the United States Postal Service (USPS) did what it was always going to do when it was announced last week that they were going ahead with their plan to shift some of the duties of the Sioux Falls Processing & Distribution Center (P&DC) to Omaha, Nebraska.

This move, coupled with a recent decision to shift the Huron P&DC duties to Fargo, North Dakota, leaves South Dakota without such a facility, and there are very serious concerns this will further slow postal deliveries in this region.

The potential problems with this decision have been chronicled by this newspaper and other media, and they have been aired in other places that are being impacted by the so-called Delivering for America (DFA) plan. This proposal carries the stated aim of improving "organizational and operational processes and actively make the Postal Service an efficient, high-performing, world-class logistics and delivery provider."

No one should buy that disingenuous hype.

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The genuine motive was on display in the carefully worded press release sent out by the USPS to announce its decision. At front and center, it trumpeted a \$12.75 million investment in the Sioux Falls facility, which was originally announced as part of the reorganizational process. (Many people and some media organizations took this to mean that the USPS had changed course in their plans.) But very deep in the release, it was announced that the distribution facility was being moved to Omaha anyway.

In the run-up to this decision, there was a poorly advertised public meeting several weeks ago in Sioux Falls, during which resistance to the plan was aired. But to no effect.

At the time of that meeting, the word we were getting from some sources was that the USPS decision was already a done deal and the public meeting seeking input was likely little more than window dressing.

The decision leaves a lot of people in this region unhappy.

"It's going to delay the mail," Todd West, president of the South Dakota Postal Workers Union, told the Press & Dakotan. "We sell service. What they're doing is deteriorating the service."

He placed much of the blame on controversial Postmaster Louis DeJoy, who West accused of trying to convert the constitutionally mandated postal service into a private operation.

The dissatisfaction in this region reflects growing displeasure, even anger, being expressed across the country.

DeJoy has been under fire since before he was confirmed during the pandemic. There have been numerous calls for him to resign. The Fortune Magazine news site wrote an article about the current situation with the blunt headline, "The Trump donor whom Biden can't fire is running the U.S. Postal Service directly into the ground."

Locally, West said the only thing residents can really do now is contact their Washington delegation members to voice their concerns. While the delegation has recently addressed the matter, there didn't seem to be a lot of urgency in their statements, which was odd considering it's going to have an impact on a broad cross section of their constituency, from pharmacies and people who get their medications mailed to them, to newspapers that use the USPS for deliveries, to businesses in general who will see their billing become even trickier.

Our lawmakers need to do more to drive the point home.

There is a growing chorus of anger across the country about this postal transformation. The pressure must continue. Otherwise, we are all going to suffer the consequences.

END

Torchbearers in Marseille kick off the Olympic flame's journey across the country

MARSEILLE, France (AP) — Torchbearers are carrying the Olympic flame Thursday through the streets of France's southern port city of Marseille, a day after it arrived on a majestic three-mast ship for the welcoming ceremony.

The torch begins its 11-week journey across the country with about 10,000 bearers passing through more than 450 towns until the Games' opening ceremony in Paris on July 26.

Former soccer player Basile Boli, who played with the Marseille team in the 1990s, kicked off Thursday's relay from the Notre Dame de la Garde basilica that overlooks Marseille and the Mediterranean.

"I'm very proud," Boli said. "You feel like you're on top of the world, because with an Olympic flame there's a special fervor.... It's the symbol of sport!"

Basketball player Tony Parker will take his turn in the relay later Thursday. A fencing champion, a skateboarder, a Michelin-starred chef and a comedian were also chosen to carry the flame.

"Let's go for a fantastic celebration," said Tony Estanguet, president of the Paris Olympics' organizing committee. "The games are back in our country... Let's share this fantastic moment of celebration with millions of people in the country."

Participants were scheduled to run all day through landmarks of the city to bring the torch on the roof of the famed Stade Velodrome, home to Marseille's passionate soccer fans.

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Sports Ministry Amélie Oudéa-Castéra said "it's fantastic to give that sense of pride to the French people and to show to the whole world what we're capable to achieve."

"We're going to give happiness to the whole world," she added.

One of the torchbearers is Ukrainian gymnast Mariia Vysochanska, who won two gold medals at the 2020 European Championships and competed at the Olympic Games in Tokyo.

It's an expression of solidarity with Ukraine as well as a symbolic gesture to mark Europe Day, which falls on May 9 each year. Vysochanska will lead a group of 27 other athletes who represent all European Union member states.

"It's a way to really celebrate Europe, its values and also to demonstrate our attachment to the European sport model," Oudéa-Castéra said. Ukraine got a green light last year to start sped-up talks on joining the EU.

"(Ukrainians) face that terrible war of aggression, and we want to really express that we support them the best we can," she added. "This is unity. This is hope. This is solidarity. And we want their victory."

Marseille on Wednesday celebrated with great fanfare the flame's arrival, with more than 230,000 people attending the ceremony in the Old Port, according to the city's mayor, Benoît Payan.

"It's just incredible, just magical," resident Amel Sekko said. "We needed it. We never have events or beautiful things like this in Marseille."

Mouna Boulhas, another Marseille resident, said: "It's something you have to experience at least once in your life."

During the Games, the sailing competition and some soccer matches will be held in Marseille.

Yemen's Houthi rebels claim 2 attacks in Gulf of Aden as Iran official renews nuclear bomb threats

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Yemen's Houthi rebels on Thursday claimed responsibility for two missile attacks in the Gulf of Aden on two Panama-flagged container ships that caused no damage. Meanwhile, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader again threatened that Tehran could build a nuclear weapon if it chose to pursue atomic armaments.

The comments by Yemeni military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree and former Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi come as the allies of Hamas continue to pressure Israel over its continuing war on the militant group in the Gaza Strip.

The Houthis insist their assaults on shipping through the crucial waterway leading to the Suez Canal and onward to the Mediterranean Sea will continue as long as the war goes on. Meanwhile, Iran already has launched an unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel amid the war, bringing a yearslong shadow conflict between the two nations out into the light.

Saree in a prerecorded statement claimed attacks on the MSC Diego and MSC Gina. The Joint Maritime Information Center, a U.S.-led coalition of nations operating in the Mideast, said those two missile attacks happened early Tuesday.

"Neither were hit and all crew on board are safe," the center said. "The vessels were last reported proceeding to next port of call."

The center added that the vessels were "likely targeted due to perceived Israeli affiliation."

Both vessels were operating for Geneva-based Mediterranean Shipping Co., which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Saree did not say why it took the rebels two days to claim the attacks. He also claimed the Houthis targeted the MSC Vittoria, another container ship, in the Indian Ocean. An attack on that vessel, however, has not been reported or acknowledged by any authorities.

The Houthis say their attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are aimed at pressuring Israel to end its war against Hamas in Gaza, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians there, according to local health officials. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200

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people and taking some 250 others hostage.

The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sunk another since November, according to the U.S. Maritime Administration. Shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has declined because of the threat.

Meanwhile Thursday, Iran's state-run IRNA news agency carried the comments made by Kharrazi, a former foreign minister under reformist President Mohammad Khatami.

Speaking to the Al Jazeera news network in an interview that appeared not to have been immediately aired, Kharrazi elaborated on an atomic bomb threat he made to the channel back in 2022 amid tensions with the West over Iran's tattered 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

"If Iran's existence is threatened, we will have to change our nuclear doctrine," Kharrazi said, according to IRNA. "Recently, the military officials also announced that if Israel wants to attack nuclear facilities, it is possible and imaginable to revise Iran's nuclear doctrine and policies and divert from the previous declaration considerations."

Tensions have grown between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency since 2018, when then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from Tehran's nuclear deal. Since then, Iran has abandoned all limits the deal put on its program and enriches uranium to up to 60% purity — near weapons-grade levels of 90%.

Meanwhile, tensions between Iran and Israel have hit a new high. Tehran launched a drone-and-missile attack on Israel last month after Israel's apparent attack on an Iranian consular building in Syria killed two Iranian generals and others.

The Iranian city of Isfahan then apparently came under Israeli fire in recent weeks, despite being surrounded by sensitive nuclear sites.

Tornadoes tear through southeastern US as storms leave 3 dead

By GEORGE WALKER IV, JOEY CAPPELLETTI and ED WHITE Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Tenn. (AP) — Forecasters warned a wave of dangerous storms in the U.S. could march through parts of the South early Thursday, after storms a day earlier spawned damaging tornadoes and massive hail, leaving two dead in Tennessee and one dead in North Carolina.

The storms continue an outbreak of torrential rain and tornadoes that has cut across the country this week, from the Plains to the Midwest and now the southeastern U.S. At least four people have died in storms since Monday.

Amid Wednesday's storms, the National Weather Service continued issuing tornado warnings that stretch past midnight in North Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Missouri and Kentucky. Parts of Arkansas and Mississippi were also under a tornado watch through the pre-dawn hours.

One storm that rumbled across northeastern Tennessee on Wednesday brought high winds that knocked down power lines and trees. Bob Brooks, the sheriff in Claiborne County about an hour north of Knoxville, said a 22-year-old man was in a car when he was fatally struck by one of the trees.

A second person was killed in the city of Columbia in Maury County, where the National Weather Service said a likely tornado had touched down. Columbia is just south of Nashville.

Homes were damaged and people injured, according to Lynn Thompson, assistant director of Maury County 911. Thompson told The Associated Press that he could not provide any further details: "We're getting overloaded right now."

Rita Thompson, a spokesperson for Maury Regional Health, said the hospital had received five patients, including the person who died. Another was in serious condition and three had injuries that were not life-threatening, she said.

The storms also prompted the Federal Aviation Administration to issue a temporary ground stop at Nashville International Airport and the National Weather Service to issue a tornado emergency — its highest alert level — for other nearby areas south of the state's capital, including Chapel Hill and Eagleville.

Meanwhile, torrential rain and thunderstorms led to water rescues northeast of Nashville.

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"Do not attempt to travel unless you are fleeing an area subject to flooding or under an evacuation order," the National Weather Service warned when it issued a flash flood emergency.

In North Carolina, a state of emergency was declared Wednesday night for Gaston County, west of Charlotte, following a large storm that toppled power lines and severed trees, including one that landed on a car. One person in the car was killed and another was taken to a hospital, officials said.

The storms rolled into the region Wednesday after parts of the central United States were battered Monday by heavy rain, strong winds, hail and tornadoes, including a deadly twister that ripped through an Oklahoma town and killed one person. Then, on Tuesday, the Midwest took the brunt of the bad weather.

The National Weather Service said tornadoes touched down in parts of Michigan, Ohio and Indiana on Tuesday.

In Michigan, tornadoes swirled through the southwestern part of the state, in and around Kalamazoo County, according to the National Weather Service. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer declared a state of emergency for four counties.

Kalamazoo County's Portage area was hard hit as a FedEx facility was ripped apart, leaving about 50 people temporarily trapped inside because of downed power lines.

Travis Wycoff ventured out Tuesday night after seeing on radar that a tornado had touched down in the Portage area, and he said he helped an elderly couple out of their partially collapsed home and freed a service dog from another home.

"There were a lot of people running through the streets trying to find people and their pets," Wycoff said. "It was just a lot of chaos."

In the adjacent Pavilion Township, more than a dozen homes were destroyed in a mobile home park and 16 people were injured, said Kalamazoo County Sheriff Richard Fuller.

Samantha Smith clutched a box Wednesday afternoon outside her mother's partially wrecked home in Pavilion Township. Inside the box were her grandmother's ashes. Being able to recover the most cherished of items offered Smith a rare moment of relief amid the storm's devastation. She said her parents and brother were injured during the storm but survived.

"I have thanked God probably a billion times since this happened yesterday," she said. "My kids are healthy and good. We just gotta make back up what we lost."

Tornadoes were also confirmed in Pennsylvania just outside Pittsburgh, in central Arkansas and in northern West Virginia. The West Virginia twister was at least the 11th tornado this year in the state, which sees two tornadoes in an average year.

Both the Plains and Midwest have been hammered by tornadoes this spring.

Civilian casualties rise in Myanmar's civil war as resistance forces tighten noose around military

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Six months into an offensive against Myanmar's military government, opposition forces have made massive gains, but civilian casualties are rising sharply as regime troops increasingly turn toward scorched-earth tactics in the Southeast Asian country's bitter civil war.

There is pressure on all fronts from powerful militias drawn from Myanmar's ethnic minority groups and newer resistance forces. Troops are retaliating with air, naval and artillery strikes on hospitals and other facilities where the opposition could be sheltered or aided.

"When the mass of people rise up against them, I think it terrifies them," said Dave Eubank, a former U.S. Special Forces soldier who founded the Free Burma Rangers, a humanitarian aid organization that has provided assistance to both combatants and civilians in Myanmar since the 1990s.

"They know that hospitals, churches, schools and monasteries are important places for human care, and gathering, and symbols — and they hammer them," said Eubank. "That's new."

Military forces now control less than half the country, but are holding on tenaciously to much of central Myanmar including the capital, Naypyidaw — recently targeted by drone attacks — and largest city, Yangon,

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and is far better armed than the resistance forces, with support from Russia and China.

"People have been saying that the regime was on the brink of collapse since two weeks after the coup," in February 2021, said Morgan Michaels, an analyst with the International Institute of Strategic Studies who runs its Myanmar Conflict Map project.

"On the other hand, obviously the regime is weaker than it's ever been.... so there's no doubt that it's in serious, serious trouble," he said.

Thet Swe, a spokesman for the military government, denied that troops were targeting buildings and areas where civilians were sheltering, blaming their destruction instead on the opposition forces, without citing evidence.

"The military never harmed hospitals, churches and civilians in our country," he told The Associated Press in an email. "They did not use that strategy and are fighting the rebels only for the sovereignty of our country."

As the fighting has moved into more populated areas, about 1 million people have been forced to flee their homes since the start of the offensive in October, contributing to the more than 3 million internally displaced people in the country of some 56 million, according to the U.N.'s humanitarian aid agency.

With the collapse of its health care system and food supplies dwindling, 18.6 million people are in need, up 1 million from a year ago, including 6 million children, the agency said.

HOW IT BEGAN

Opposition in Myanmar, also known as Burma, had been growing since the army seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021, but it gained new momentum in October when major militias known collectively as the Three Brotherhood Alliance launched a joint offensive.

Together, the Arakan Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army — among the most powerful militias formed by Myanmar's ethnic minorities — made quick advances.

As they captured huge swaths of territory largely in the north and northeast, including economically important border crossings with China and several major military bases, other ethnic armed groups sensed momentum and joined the fighting.

At the same time, People's Defense Forces — armed resistance groups that support the shadow National Unity Government, which views itself as Myanmar's legitimate administration — have been increasing in number and launching their own attacks, often supported and trained by the ethnic armed militias.

Both sides claim they have inflicted heavy tolls. And the military government under Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing has acknowledged it is under pressure, recently reintroducing conscription to increase its ranks.

That has pushed some young people into the resistance. Many more have fled to rural areas or neighboring countries to avoid fighting.

With the violence across its border, China helped broker a cease-fire in Myanmar's north in January with the Three Brotherhood Alliance. But the alliance's Arakan Army continues to fight in its home Rakhine state in the west and has made significant gains, while PDFs and other ethnic armed groups continue their own attacks elsewhere.

THE LATEST FIGHTING

The fiercest fighting in recent weeks has been in the southeast, where the main ethnic Karen fighting force, the Karen National Liberation Army, claimed in early April to have seized all the military bases in Myawaddy, the main town on the border with Thailand in Kayin state, also known as Karen state.

One army battalion clung to a position beside one of Myawaddy's two bridges, assisted by the Border Guard Force, a rival Karen group that had been in charge of border area security for years, conducting lucrative business by providing protection to area casino resorts with links to organized crime.

The force, which declared itself neutral in January, now controls the town with military government administrators still in place, highlighting how some militia groups still prioritize their own interests.

"This is not a black and white situation. This is not the regime reconquering and reconsolidating control," Michaels said of the fighting in the area. "This is the regime hanging on, keeping a foothold by the razor's

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edge.”

Meanwhile, the military has pushed KNLA and People’s Defense Forces out of Kawkareik, a strategically important town along the road that connects Myawaddy with the rest of the country.

Thousands of civilians have fled Myawaddy and Kawkareik. But many civilians haven’t managed to escape.

At least 1,015 civilian deaths have been documented from Nov. 1 through May 1, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a watchdog group that tracks political arrests, attacks and casualties. It says 4,962 civilians have been killed overall since the military took power three years ago.

The watchdog blamed the deaths on the military’s increasing use of scorched-earth tactics and fighting moving into more populated areas.

“The military has increasingly lost areas of control in recent months, which has only increased their use of this strategy, responding with airstrikes, shelling and so on in civilian areas,” the AAPP said in an email.

The group added that the number of civilian deaths in the recent months of fighting is likely double what it reported, if not more, but that it can’t document the numbers due to the intensification of the conflict.

Kyaw Zaw, a spokesperson for the shadow National Unity Government, said the military had destroyed 343 hospitals and clinics since it took power, and that those attacks had accelerated in the last two months, though he didn’t have specific details.

Eubank, with the Free Burma Rangers, said he and his teams operating near the front lines have witnessed the military, known as the Tatmadaw, fighting with a “speed and force and a viciousness that we’ve never seen.”

But in fighting a common enemy, the resistance is showing growing unity, he said.

“The Burma army is still stronger than any of these resistance groups, and if they want to bring a division or two to bear, they will win the battle, but they’re not stronger than everybody else together,” he said.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Whether that unity will continue if the regime falls, and if the disparate resistance forces can agree on a common path ahead for Myanmar, is an open question, Michaels said.

“On one hand, Myanmar is not Syria — there is common cause in fighting the regime,” Michaels said. “But at the same time, as the regime has receded from some areas, there are at least indicators of potential future conflicts between groups.”

He noted an incident in northern Shan state last month in which troops from two members of the Three Brotherhood Alliance — the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army — traded fire over a territorial dispute. One person was injured.

The groups quickly agreed to stand down, but the incident illustrates that territorial tension is real, Michaels said.

An opposition politician still inside the country, speaking on condition of anonymity for his own safety, said Myanmar’s people have a common desire for peace and stability, but the various factions still pursue their own interests.

“It is hard to predict what is ahead, and they still don’t have a single political direction or goal. I think there is quite a problem in this situation,” he said.

“Myanmar is now at a crossroads.”

Russia’s celebration of victory in World War II is a key pillar of Putin’s rule

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia on Thursday wrapped itself in patriotic pageantry for Victory Day, a celebration of its defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II that President Vladimir Putin has turned into a pillar of his nearly quarter-century in power and a justification of his move into Ukraine.

Even though few veterans of what Russia calls the Great Patriotic War are still alive 79 years after Berlin fell to the Red Army, the victory over Nazi Germany remains the most important and widely revered symbol of the country’s prowess and a key element of national identity.

Thursday’s festivities across Russia, led by Putin who this week began his fifth term in office, recall that

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wartime sacrifice in what has become its most important secular holiday.

"The Victory Day unites all generations," Putin said in a speech at Red Square parade. "We are going forward relying on our centuries-old traditions and feel confident that together we will ensure a free and secure future of Russia."

He hailed the troops fighting in Ukraine for their courage and blasted the West, accusing it of "fueling regional conflicts, inter-ethnic and inter-religious strife and trying to contain sovereign and independent centers of global development."

Amid Russia-West tensions that soared to the highest level since the Cold War times over Ukraine, Putin also issued another stark reminder about Russia's nuclear might.

"Russia will do everything to prevent global confrontation, but will not allow anyone to threaten us," he said. "Our strategic forces are in combat readiness."

The Soviet Union lost about 27 million people in the war, an estimate that many historians consider conservative, scarring virtually every family.

Nazi troops overran much of the western Soviet Union when they invaded in June 1941, before being driven back all the way to Berlin, where the USSR's hammer and sickle flag was raised above the ruined capital. The U.S., U.K, France and other allies mark the end of the war in Europe on May 8.

The immense suffering and sacrifice in cities like Stalingrad, Kursk and Putin's native Leningrad — now St. Petersburg — still serve as a powerful symbol of the country's ability to prevail against seemingly overwhelming challenges.

Since coming to power on the last day of 1999, Putin has made May 9 an important part of his political agenda, featuring displays of military might. Columns of tanks and missiles roll across Red Square and squadrons of fighter jets roar overhead as medal-bedecked veterans join him to review the parade. Many wear the black-and-orange St. George's ribbon that is traditionally associated with Victory Day.

About 9,000 troops, including some 1,000 who fought in Ukraine, took part in Thursday's parade.

Putin, 71, talks frequently about his family history, sharing memories of his father, who fought on the front during the Nazi siege of the city and was badly wounded.

As Putin tells it, his father, also named Vladimir, came home from a military hospital during the war to see workers trying to take away his wife, Maria, who had been declared dead of starvation. But the elder Putin did not believe she had died — saying she had only lost consciousness, weak with hunger. Their first child, Viktor, died during the siege when he was 3, one of more than 1 million Leningrad residents who died in the 872-day blockade, most of them from starvation.

For several years, Putin carried a photo of his father in Victory Day marches — as did others honoring relatives who were war veterans — in what was called the "Immortal Regiment."

Those demonstrations were suspended during the coronavirus pandemic and then again amid security concerns after the start of the fighting in Ukraine.

As part of his efforts to burnish the Soviet legacy and trample on any attempts to question it, Russia has introduced laws that criminalized the "rehabilitation of Nazism" that include punishing the "desecration" of memorials or challenging Kremlin versions of World War II history.

When he sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, Putin evoked World War II in seeking to justify his actions that Kyiv and its Western allies denounced as an unprovoked war of aggression. Putin cited the "denazification" of Ukraine as a main goal of Moscow, falsely describing the government of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is Jewish and lost relatives in the Holocaust, as neo-Nazis.

Putin tried to cast Ukraine's veneration of some of its nationalist leaders who cooperated with the Nazis in World War II as a sign of Kyiv's purported Nazi sympathies. He regularly made unfounded references to Ukrainian nationalist figures such as Stepan Bandera, who was killed by a Soviet spy in Munich in 1959, as an underlying justification for the Russian military action in Ukraine.

Many observers see Putin's focus on World War II as part of his efforts to revive the USSR's clout and prestige and his reliance on Soviet practices.

"It's the continuous self-identification with the USSR as the victor of Nazism and the lack of any other

strong legitimacy that forced the Kremlin to declare 'denazification' as the goal of the war," Nikolay Epplee said in a commentary for Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center.

The Russian leadership, he said, has "locked itself up in a worldview limited by the Soviet past."

House rejects Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene's effort to oust Speaker Mike Johnson, but chaos lingers

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hardline Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene tried and failed in a brazen push to oust House Speaker Mike Johnson, but the resounding rejection by Republicans and Democrats tired of the turmoil does not guarantee an end to the GOP chaos.

One of Donald Trump's biggest supporters in Congress, Greene stood on the House floor late Wednesday and read a long list of "transgressions" she said Johnson had committed as speaker, from his passage of a \$95 billion national security package with aid for Ukraine to his reliance on Democrats wield power.

Colleagues booed in protest. But Greene soldiered on, criticizing Johnson's leadership as "pathetic, weak and unacceptable."

After Greene triggered the vote on her motion to vacate the Republican speaker from his office, Republican Majority Leader Steve Scalise quickly countered by calling first for a vote to table it.

An overwhelming majority, 359-43, kept Johnson in his job, for now.

"As I've said from the beginning, and I've made clear here every day, I intend to do my job," Johnson said afterward. "And I'll let the chips fall where they may. In my view, that is leadership."

It's the second time in a matter of months that Republicans have worked to oust their own speaker, an unheard of level of party upheaval with a move rarely seen in U.S. history.

While the outcome temporarily calms the latest source of House disruption, the vote tally shows the strengths but also the stark limits of Johnson's hold on the gavel, and the risks ahead for any Republican trying to lead the GOP.

Without Democratic help, Johnson would have certainly faced a more dismal outcome. All told, 11 Republicans voted to proceed with Greene's effort, more than it took to oust then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy last fall, a first in U.S. history.

But by relying on Democratic backing, Johnson risks inciting more criticism that he is insufficiently loyal to the party.

And the threat still lingers — any single lawmaker can call up the motion to vacate the speaker.

Even though Trump provided a needed nod of support for Johnson at crucial moments, it's not bankable going forward. The former president posed an idle warning about potentially ousting the speaker as voting was getting underway.

"At some point, we may very well be, but this is not the time," Trump said on social media.

Trump also made clear he still valued Greene, perhaps his biggest ally in the House, even as he rejected her proposal. "I absolutely love Marjorie Taylor Greene," he said as he urged Republicans to table her motion.

As Greene pressed ahead with the snap vote, GOP lawmakers filtered towards Johnson, giving him pats on the back and grasping his shoulder to assure him of their support.

The Georgia Republican had vowed weeks ago she would force a vote on the motion to vacate the Republican speaker if he dared to advance the foreign aid package for Ukraine, which was overwhelmingly approved late last month and signed into law.

But in recent days it seemed her effort had cooled, as she and Johnson met repeatedly for a potential resolution.

Johnson of Louisiana marched on, saying he had been willing to take the risk to approve the foreign aid, believing it was important for the U.S. to back Ukraine against Russia's invasion and explaining he wanted to be on the "right side of history."

Highly unusual, the boost from Democrats led by Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, showed the exhaustion in Congress over the far-right antics. Jeffries and his leadership team had said it was time to "turn the

page” on the GOP turmoil and vote to table Greene’s resolution — ensuring Johnson’s job is saved, for now.

“Our decision to stop Marjorie Taylor Greene from plunging the country into further chaos is rooted in our commitment to solve problems,” Jeffries said after the vote.

But Democrats have also made clear their help was for this moment alone, and not a promise of an enduring partnership for Johnson’s survival.

Asked about a future motion to vacate the speaker, Jeffries said, “Haven’t given it a thought.”

The move now poses its own political risks for Greene, a high-profile provocateur who has moved to the forefront of the party with her own massive following and proximity to Trump.

Greene was determined to force her colleagues to be on the record with their vote – putting them in the politically uncomfortable position of backing the speaker and seen as joining forces with Democrats to save him.

“I’m proud of what I did today,” Greene said afterward on the Capitol steps.

While reporters and camera crews crowded around Greene and ally Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., a group of other Republicans gathered on the steps trying to shift the attention away from her and make their own views known.

Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D., said of those trying to remove the speaker, “They’re pretty good at getting attention, but they have not been recognized for their ability to get things done.”

He said if they keep pushing to oust the speaker, “I think you can expect more of the same: Failure.”

Reps. Carlos Giménez, a Florida Republican, said of Greene: “She doesn’t represent the Republican Party. I’m tired of of this being the face or the voice of the party and getting attention. That’s all she wants, is the attention.”

Rep. Mike Lawler, R-N.Y., called for Greene and Massie to be punished for their actions.

Had Democrats not taken the unusual move to help, the vote would most likely have ended differently for Johnson who holds one of the slimmest majorities in the House in modern times, with no votes to spare.

Last year, the House chamber was hurled into chaos when eight Republicans voted to remove McCarthy from the speaker’s office and Democrats declined to help save him.

Ousting McCarthy resulted in a nearly monthlong search for a new GOP leader, bringing the chamber to a standstill with an episode Republicans wanted to avoid ahead of the November election.

Transitional council in Haiti embraces new changes following turmoil as gang violence grips country

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — A transitional council tasked with choosing new leaders for Haiti is changing the way it operates in a move that surprised many as gang violence consumes the country.

Instead of having a single council president, four longtime politicians will take turns leading the council every five months, according to two members who were not authorized to publicly share the changes because they had not yet been announced.

The members told The Associated Press late Wednesday that the council also will now consider five members a majority, instead of four. The council is composed of nine members, seven of which have voting powers.

“That’s a real switch,” Robert Fatton, a Haitian politics expert at the University of Virginia, said of the changes. “I think it’s a good thing that they’re really going to share power now. ... It is something that is very rare in Haitian politics.”

The four members who will share power are original council president Edgard Leblanc Fils, ex-senator Louis Gérald Gilles, former presidential candidate Leslie Voltaire and ex-ambassador for the Dominican Republic Smith Augustin.

The changes follow inner turmoil that threatened to derail the council after it was sworn in on April 25. The bickering began five days later, when four council members announced not only a council president

but also a prime minister to the shock of many.

However, it remains to be seen if former sports minister Fritz Bélizaire will remain as the chosen prime minister. One council member told AP that they expect to make an announcement next week.

After a prime minister is announced, the council expects to choose a new Cabinet, a process many expect will involve long and heavy negotiations with powerful politicians.

"That's going to be the other major issue," Fatton warned.

The changes come as Haiti prepares for the U.N.-backed deployment of a Kenyan police force to help fight gangs that have decimated swaths of the capital of Port-au-Prince.

On Feb. 29, gangs launched coordinated attacks; they burned police stations, opened fire on the main international airport that has remained closed since March 4 and stormed Haiti's two biggest prisons, releasing more than 4,000 inmates. The country's largest seaport also remains paralyzed as food, medication and other critical items dwindle.

At least 1.4 million Haitians are on the verge of famine, according to the U.N.'s World Food Program.

U.S. military planes have landed in recent days with supplies including medicine and oral hydration fluids as well as civilian contractors to prepare for the arrival of foreign forces, although it's not clear exactly when the Kenyan police would deploy.

A team of top Kenyan security officials are in Washington D.C. this week to finalize deployment plans, including the number of police that will be sent.

As Haiti awaits foreign forces, gang violence has surged in recent days. They have attacked several communities near downtown Port-au-Prince, forcing more than 3,700 people to flee their homes.

On Tuesday, at least four people died and several others were injured when someone opened fire on a bus driving through Martissant, a gang-controlled area in southwestern Port-au-Prince.

Kidnappings also have increased, with a female police officer killed Wednesday morning while trying to fight off gangs who tried to abduct her, said police union leader Lionel Lazarre.

More than 2,500 people have been killed or injured in the first three months of the year, a 50% increase compared with the same period last year, according to the U.N.

Biden says US won't supply weapons for Israel to attack Rafah, in warning to ally

By ZEKE MILLER and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said Wednesday that he would not supply offensive weapons that Israel could use to launch an all-out assault on Rafah — the last major Hamas stronghold in Gaza — over concern for the well-being of the more than 1 million civilians sheltering there.

Biden, in an interview with CNN, said the U.S. was still committed to Israel's defense and would supply Iron Dome rocket interceptors and other defensive arms, but that if Israel goes into Rafah, "we're not going to supply the weapons and artillery shells used."

The U.S. has historically provided enormous amounts of military aid to Israel. That has only accelerated in the aftermath of Hamas' Oct. 7 attack that killed some 1,200 in Israel and led to about 250 being taken captive by militants. Biden's comments and his decision last week to pause a shipment of heavy bombs to Israel are the most striking manifestations of the growing daylight between his administration and Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government. Biden said Wednesday that Israel's actions around Rafah had "not yet" crossed his red lines, but has repeated that Israel needs to do far more to protect the lives of civilians in Gaza.

The shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs and 1,700 500-pound (225-kilogram) bombs, according to a senior U.S. administration official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. The focus of U.S. concern was the larger explosives and how they could be used in a dense urban area.

"Civilians have been killed in Gaza as a consequence of those bombs and other ways in which they go after population centers," Biden told CNN. "I made it clear that if they go into Rafah — they haven't gone

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in Rafah yet — if they go into Rafah, I'm not supplying the weapons that have been used historically to deal with Rafah, to deal with the cities, that deal with that problem."

"We're not walking away from Israel's security," Biden continued. "We're walking away from Israel's ability to wage war in those areas."

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin earlier Wednesday confirmed the weapons delay, telling the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense that the U.S. paused "one shipment of high payload munitions."

"We're going to continue to do what's necessary to ensure that Israel has the means to defend itself," Austin said. "But that said, we are currently reviewing some near-term security assistance shipments in the context of unfolding events in Rafah."

It also comes as the Biden administration is due to deliver a first-of-its-kind formal verdict this week on whether the airstrikes on Gaza and restrictions on delivery of aid have violated international and U.S. laws designed to spare civilians from the worst horrors of war. A decision against Israel would further add to pressure on Biden to curb the flow of weapons and money to Israel's military.

Biden signed off on the pause in an order conveyed last week to the Pentagon, according to U.S. officials who were not authorized to comment on the matter. The White House National Security Council sought to keep the decision out of the public eye for several days until it had a better understanding of the scope of Israel's intensified military operations in Rafah and until Biden could deliver a long-planned speech on Tuesday to mark Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Biden's administration in April began reviewing future transfers of military assistance as Netanyahu's government appeared to move closer toward an invasion of Rafah, despite months of opposition from the White House. The official said the decision to pause the shipment was made last week and no final decision had been made yet on whether to proceed with the shipment at a later date.

U.S. officials had declined for days to comment on the halted transfer, word of which came as Biden on Tuesday described U.S. support for Israel as "ironclad, even when we disagree."

Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Gilad Erdan, in an interview with Israeli Channel 12 TV news, said the decision to pause the shipment was "a very disappointing decision, even frustrating." He suggested the move stemmed from political pressure on Biden from Congress, the U.S. campus protests and the upcoming election.

The decision also drew a sharp rebuke from House Speaker Mike Johnson and Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, who said they only learned about the military aid holdup from press reports, despite assurances from the Biden administration that no such pauses were in the works. The Republicans called on Biden in a letter to swiftly end the blockage, saying it "risks emboldening Israel's enemies," and to brief lawmakers on the nature of the policy reviews.

Biden has faced pressure from some on the left — and condemnation from the critics on the right who say Biden has moderated his support for an essential Mideast ally.

"If we stop weapons necessary to destroy the enemies of the state of Israel at a time of great peril, we will pay a price," said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., his voice rising in anger during an exchange with Austin. "This is obscene. It is absurd. Give Israel what they need to fight the war they can't afford to lose."

Independent Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, a Biden ally, said in a statement the pause on big bombs must be a "first step."

"Our leverage is clear," Sanders said. "Over the years, the United States has provided tens of billions of dollars in military aid to Israel. We can no longer be complicit in Netanyahu's horrific war against the Palestinian people."

Austin, meanwhile, told lawmakers that "it's about having the right kinds of weapons for the task at hand."

"A small diameter bomb, which is a precision weapon, that's very useful in a dense, built-up environment," he said, "but maybe not so much a 2,000-pound bomb that could create a lot of collateral damage." He said the U.S. wants to see Israel do "more precise" operations.

Israeli troops on Tuesday seized control of Gaza's vital Rafah border crossing in what the White House described as a limited operation that stopped short of the full-on Israeli invasion of the city that Biden has

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repeatedly warned against, most recently in a Monday call with Netanyahu.

Israel has ordered the evacuation of 100,000 Palestinians from the city. Israeli forces have also carried out what it describes as "targeted strikes" on the eastern part of Rafah and captured the Rafah crossing, a critical conduit for the flow of humanitarian aid along the Gaza-Egypt border.

Privately, concern has mounted inside the White House about what's unfolding in Rafah, but publicly administration officials have stressed that they did not think the operations had defied Biden's warnings against a widescale operation in the city.

The State Department is separately considering whether to approve the continued transfer of Joint Direct Attack Munition kits, which place precision guidance systems onto bombs, to Israel, but the review didn't pertain to imminent shipments.

Itamar Yaar, former deputy head of Israel's National Security Council said the U.S. move is largely symbolic, but a sign of trouble and could become more of a problem if it is sustained.

"It's not some kind of American embargo on American munitions support, but I think it's some kind of diplomatic message to Mr. Netanyahu that he needs to take into consideration American interests more than he has over the last few months," he said. "At least for now it will not impact Israeli capability but it's some kind of a signal, a 'be careful.'"

The U.S. dropped the 2,000-pound bomb sparingly in its long war against the Islamic State militant group. Israel, by contrast, has used the bomb frequently in the seven-month Gaza war. Experts say the use of the weapon, in part, has helped drive the enormous Palestinian casualty count that the Hamas-run health ministry puts at more than 34,000 dead, though it doesn't distinguish between militants and civilians.

The U.S.-Israel relationship has been close through both Democratic and Republican administrations. But there have been other moments of deep tension since Israel's founding in which U.S. leaders have threatened to hold up aid in an attempt to sway Israeli leadership.

President Dwight Eisenhower pressured Israel with the threat of sanctions into withdrawing from the Sinai in 1957 amid the Suez Crisis. Ronald Reagan delayed the delivery of F16 fighter jets to Israel at a time of escalating violence in the Middle East. President George H.W. Bush held up \$10 billion in loan guarantees to force the cessation of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories.

Vatican and Rome enter final dash to 2025 Jubilee with papal bull and around-the-clock construction

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican crosses a key milestone Thursday in the runup to its 2025 Jubilee with the promulgation of the official decree establishing the Holy Year. It's a once-every-quarter-century event that is expected to bring some 32 million pilgrims to Rome and has already brought months of headaches to Romans.

Pope Francis will preside over a ceremony in St. Peter's Basilica for the formal reading of the papal bull, or official edict, that lays out the spiritual theme of hope for the year. The event also kicks off the final seven-month dash of preparations and public works projects to be completed by Dec. 24, when Francis opens the basilica's Holy Door and formally inaugurates the Jubilee.

For the Vatican, the Holy Year is a centuries-old tradition of pilgrims visiting the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul, and receiving indulgences for the forgiveness of their sins in the process. For the city of Rome, it's a chance to take advantage of some 4 billion euros in public funds to carry out long-delayed projects to lift the city out of years of decay and neglect.

"In a beautiful city, you live better," said the Vatican's Jubilee point-person, Archbishop Renato Fisichella, who himself is not indifferent to the added bonus of Jubilee funding. "Rome will become an even more beautiful city, because it will be ever more at the service of its people, pilgrims and tourists who will come."

Pope Boniface VIII declared the first Holy Year in 1300, and now they are held every 25 years. While Francis called an interim one devoted to mercy in 2015, the 2025 edition is the first big one since St. John

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Paul II's 2000 Jubilee, when he ushered the Catholic Church into the third millennium.

As occurred in the runup to 2000, pre-Jubilee public works projects have overwhelmed Rome, with flood-lit construction sites operating around the clock, entire swaths of central boulevards rerouted and traffic snarling the city's already clogged streets.

The Tiber riverfront for much of the city is now off limits as work crews create new parks. Piazzas are being repaved, bike paths charted and 5G cells built, all aiming to bring the Eternal City up to par with other European capitals and take advantage of the 1.3 billion euros in special Jubilee funding and some 3 billion euros more in other public and EU funds that are available.

And that's not even counting the longer-term, separate project to extend Rome's Metro C subway line to Rome's historic center, which has encountered years of delays thanks to the archaeological excavations of ancient Roman ruins that must be completed first.

For the next four years at least, central Piazza Venezia and its Imperial Forum-flanked boulevard to the Colosseum are scheduled to be congested and blighted by giant, 14-meter (yard) high green silos that are needed for the subway drilling operation.

Rome Mayor Roberto Gualtieri said recently he was satisfied with the pace of the Jubilee works so far, noting that they got off to a months-delayed start due to the 2022 collapse of Premier Mario Dragi's government.

But Gualtieri promised they would be completed on time. And in a nod to Romans and tourists who have suffered from the traffic chaos and acute shortage of taxis already, he promised that an extra 1,000 taxi licenses had been approved and would be in use by December.

Yet as of late last month, only two of the 231 city projects had been completed; 57 were under way and another 44 were expected to be started by the end of May, Gualtieri told reporters. Another 18 are up for bids, seven have been assigned, 90 are planned. Thirteen have been canceled.

"We have recovered a lot from the initial delay," Gualtieri told the foreign press association, adding that he expected the "essential" projects to be completed on time while others were always planned to take longer than the Jubilee but were lumped into the overall project.

The most significant project, and one that has caused the greatest traffic disruption to date, is a new Vatican-area piazza and pedestrian zone connecting Castel St. Angelo with the Via della Conciliazione boulevard that leads to St. Peter's Square.

Previously, a major thoroughfare divided the two landmarks, causing an unsightly and pedestrian-unfriendly barrier.

The new works call for a tunnel to divert the oncoming traffic underneath the new pedestrian piazza. But that project required re-routing and replacing a huge underground sewage system first, which has only recently been completed. Now crews are working through the night to try to complete the tunnel in time.

Southern Brazil is still reeling from massive flooding as it faces risk from new storms

By MAURICIO SAVARESE and GABRIELA SÁ PESSOA Associated Press

PORTO ALEGRE, Brazil (AP) — As major floods engulfed entire cities in the northern part of the Brazil's Rio Grande do Sul state last week, meteorologist Estael Sias knew the water would drain into capital Porto Alegre's metropolitan region and that she would need to find a safe place.

So she, her husband, three children, and two dogs left everything behind. Less than 24 hours later, water started filling her neighborhood in Canoas, now one of the state's most affected cities.

"My house was inundated," Sias recalled, her voice cracking. "And it was very hard to leave my house, to make my family leave." She said she could protect her close family, but not others who insisted on staying put. "It has been very distressing and still is. I don't know how it will be when I return home."

Authorities in southern Brazil rushed Wednesday to rescue survivors of massive flooding that has killed at least 100 people, but some residents refused to leave belongings behind while others returned to evacuated homes despite the risk of new storms.

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Heavy rains and flooding in Rio Grande do Sul since last week also have left 130 people missing, authorities said. More than 230,000 have been displaced, and much of the region has been isolated by the floodwaters.

Storms were expected in the state on Wednesday evening, with hail and wind gusts reaching up to 60 kilometers per hour (37 mph), according to the national meteorology institute's afternoon bulletin. And the institute forecasts a cold front this weekend with additional rains, to be particularly intense in the state's north and east.

In Porto Alegre, about 300 people were sheltering at the local club Gremio Nautico Uniao, based in the upscale, little-harmed neighborhood of Moinhos de Vento. Dozens lay on mattresses as volunteers brought boxes filled with feijoada — a typical Brazilian bean-and-pork stew.

Heitor da Silva was among them, having heeded authorities' warnings. Still, he's anxious about his future. "I only took my documents, three shirts, two pieces of underwear and my flip-flops. All the rest is gone," said da Silva, 68. "I already had very little, but that stayed there. When I go home, there will be nothing. Then what?"

Staffers of the state's civil defense agency told The Associated Press they have been struggling to persuade residents of the city of Eldorado do Sul, one of the hardest hit by the floods, to leave their homes. It is located beside Porto Alegre, near the center of the state's coastline. At least four people declined to evacuate.

A flyover of Eldorado do Sul in a military helicopter showed hundreds of houses submerged, with only their roofs visible. Residents were using small boards, surfboards and personal watercraft to move around. Mayor Ernani de Freitas told local journalists that the city "will be totally evacuated."

"It will take at least a year to recover," he said.

Rio Grande do Sul's Gov. Eduardo Leite, speaking at a news conference late Tuesday, appealed to residents to stay out of harm's way, as the anticipated downpour may cause more severe flooding across the state.

"It isn't the time to return home," he said.

The civil defense agency's own urgent warning asking displaced residents not to return to flooded areas also stressed the risk of disease transmission.

Army Gen. Marcelo Zucco, one of the coordinators of rescue operations, told the AP his team is working at full speed before heavy rains that are forecast to hit the Porto Alegre area this weekend. Moderate rain was falling Wednesday afternoon in the city.

"We hope the next rains are not like those we saw, but there's no way to be sure there won't be trouble ahead of us," Zucco said.

"At this moment we are focusing on finishing rescue operations and starting logistical support to the population. That's bringing water, medication, food and transportation for the sick to some hospital," the general added.

He also said some improvement in conditions for the day helped his men finally access some areas by land.

Unusually heavy rains have also inundated parts of Uruguay, causing rivers to overflow in the country's east and displacing nearly 1,000 people, authorities said, with rescuers reporting that they had evacuated 200 stranded people, helped by the army. There were no immediate reports of casualties, but the rescue service said flash floods had damaged over a dozen roads and left thousands of people without electricity.

Over the weekend, rain in northern Rio Grande do Sul could prompt renewed swelling of rivers that are already causing widespread flooding around the Patos lagoon, where the Porto Alegre municipal region is located, said Sias, the meteorologist in Rio Grande do Sul, who works for a forecasting service based there.

"We will remain on this level of alert at least until the end of the month," she said.

A report by the National Confederation of Municipalities estimates damages at 4.6 billion reais (\$930 million) in nearly 80% of Rio Grande do Sul's municipalities.

Gov. Leite has said that the enormous impact will require something akin to the Marshall Plan for Europe's post-WWII recovery. Already the state has asked the federal government to suspend debt payments and create a fund for the southern region.

On Tuesday, Congress passed a decree declaring a state of calamity in Rio Grande do Sul until the end of the year, allowing the federal government to quickly allocate money to mitigate the catastrophe and rebuild regions affected by the floods, bypassing a spending cap. The vote united supporters and opponents of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's government.

"There is no limit to the public spending necessary to resolve the problem of the calamity that today is ravaging Rio Grande do Sul state," Planning and Budget Minister Simone Tebet told Radio Gaucha in an interview.

Defense attacks Stormy Daniels' credibility as she returns to the stand in Trump's hush money trial

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JAKE OFFENHARTZ, JENNIFER PELTZ and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Stormy Daniels will return to the witness stand Thursday in Donald Trump's hush money trial as the defense tries to undermine the credibility of the porn actor's salacious testimony about their alleged sexual encounter and the money she was paid to keep quiet.

The trial against the former president kicks back off with defense lawyers questioning Daniels, whose account is key to the prosecutors' case accusing Trump of scheming to illegally influence the 2016 presidential campaign by suppressing unflattering stories about him.

Trump looked on in the courtroom as Daniels for hours on Tuesday described an unexpected sexual encounter she says they had in 2006. Trump denies they ever had sex. Still, a decade later, Trump's then-lawyer, Michael Cohen, paid her to stay silent in the final weeks of the presidential campaign.

Daniels' testimony was an extraordinary moment in what could be the only criminal case against the presumptive Republican presidential nominee to go to trial before voters decide in November whether to send him back to the White House. Trump has pleaded not guilty, denies any wrongdoing and has cast himself as the victim of a politically tainted justice system working to deny him another term.

Trump's lawyers have sought to paint Daniels as a liar and extortionist who's trying to take down the former president after drawing money and fame from her story about him. Daniels dug in at times in the face of pointed questions, forcefully denying the idea that she had tried to extort Trump.

"Am I correct that you hate President Trump?" defense lawyer Susan Necheles asked Daniels.

"Yes," she acknowledged.

Trump scowled and shook his head through much of Daniels' description of their alleged sexual encounter after she met Trump at a 2006 Lake Tahoe celebrity golf outing where sponsors included the adult film studio where she worked. At one point, the judge told defense lawyers during a sidebar conversation — out of earshot of the jury and the public — that he could hear Trump "cursing audibly."

"I am speaking to you here at the bench because I don't want to embarrass him," Judge Juan M. Merchan told Trump's lawyers, according to a transcript of the proceedings.

For the first time in the trial, the defense pushed for a mistrial Tuesday over Daniels' detailed testimony, calling it "extremely prejudicial." The judge denied the request, partly blaming the defense for not objecting more vigorously when she was testifying to stop her from giving more detail than she should have.

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

Testimony so far has made clear that at the time of the payment to Daniels, Trump and his campaign were reeling from the October 2016 publication of the never-before-seen 2005 "Access Hollywood" footage in which he boasted about grabbing women's genitals without their permission.

Prosecutors have argued that the political firestorm over the "Access Hollywood" tape hastened Cohen to pay Daniels to keep her from going public with her claims that could further hurt Trump in the eyes of female voters.

Trump's lawyers have sought to show that Trump was trying to protect his reputation and family — not

his campaign — by shielding them from embarrassing stories about his personal life.

Police break up another protest by pro-Palestinian activists at the University of Amsterdam

AMSTERDAM (AP) — In sometimes violent confrontations, police broke up a protest by pro-Palestinian activists at the University of Amsterdam Wednesday in a second straight day of unrest over the war in Gaza.

After police ended a blockade on university grounds, hundreds of demonstrators moved to a nearby square to continue protesting late into the evening, demanding an end to the war. Some asked the university to sever academic relations with Israel.

It was unclear if and how many people were injured during the scuffles and how many protesters were detained by police.

Also, at Utrecht University, some 45 kilometers (30 miles) to the south, students occupied a university building to protest Israeli actions in its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Student protests have been gaining momentum across Europe, following similar actions in the U.S. universities where several encampments have spread out.

The war started after the Palestinian militant groups attacked the southern of Israel, killing 1,200 people in a surprise attack and taking around 250 hostage. Israel's retaliatory military operation has killed more than 34,700 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and has devastated the Gaza Strip.

Powerful storms kill 3 as tornadoes tear through central and southeastern US

By GEORGE WALKER IV, JOEY CAPPELLETTI and ED WHITE Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Tenn. (AP) — Severe storms tore through parts of the U.S. again Wednesday, spawning damaging tornadoes, producing massive hail, and killing two people in Tennessee and one person in North Carolina.

A storm that rumbled across northeastern Tennessee brought high winds that knocked down powerlines and trees. Claiborne County Sheriff Bob Brooks said a 22-year-old man was in a car struck by one of the trees.

Wednesday afternoon, a tornado emergency — the weather service's highest alert level — was issued for an area south of Nashville including the towns of Spring Hill, Chapel Hill and Eagleville.

The National Weather Service had previously reported a likely tornado on the ground in nearby Columbia, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) south of Nashville. People in Columbia were injured and homes were damaged, according to Lynn Thompson, assistant director of Maury County 911. Thompson told The Associated Press that he could not provide any further details: "We're getting overloaded right now."

Rita Thompson, Marketing & Communications director with Maury Regional Health, said the hospital had received five patients. One died, another was in serious condition and three had injuries that were not life-threatening.

The Federal Aviation Administration issued a temporary ground stop at Nashville International Airport because of the weather, media outlets reported. Northeast of Nashville, a flash flood emergency was issued for Sumner and Robertson counties including the cities of Hendersonville and Gallatin. The National Weather Service said water rescues were ongoing in those areas and described the flooding from heavy thunderstorms as life-threatening.

"Do not attempt to travel unless you are fleeing an area subject to flooding or under an evacuation order," the weather agency alert said.

The National Weather Service in Nashville on Wednesday evening issued a tornado watch for parts of Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri and Tennessee until 3 a.m. CDT. The weather service continued issuing tornado warnings into the night, mostly in Tennessee, but also in Missouri, Alabama, Georgia and Texas.

In North Carolina, a state of emergency was declared for Gaston County Wednesday evening following

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a large storm. First responders were working to clear roads of downed power lines and broken trees and were helping residents, officials said. The New Hope Fire Department responded to a tree down on a car. One person in the car was killed and another was taken to a hospital, officials said.

More than 135,000 customers had lost power in the state as of Wednesday evening, according to PowerOutage.us.

The National Weather Service confirmed tornadoes touched down Tuesday in western Ohio: five in Warren County and one each in Darke, Mercer and Auglaize counties. The weather service said crews are still surveying areas in other counties to determine if tornadoes struck there, as well. The strong storms also brought hail and heavy rains to the state and knocked out power to thousands of utility customers.

In Michigan, weather service meteorologist Nathan Jeruzal said the tornadoes there touched down one each in Kalamazoo, Cass and Branch counties — all in the southwestern part of the state. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer declared a state of emergency for four counties.

Kalamazoo County's Portage area was hard hit as a FedEx facility was ripped apart and more than a dozen mobile homes were destroyed. About 50 people temporarily were trapped inside the damaged facility because of downed power lines.

More than a dozen homes were destroyed in a mobile home park in adjacent Pavilion Township and 16 people were injured, said Kalamazoo County Sheriff Richard Fuller.

Samantha Smith clutched a box Wednesday afternoon as she stepped from her mother's partially wrecked home in Pavilion Township, about 137 miles (220 kilometers) west of Detroit. Inside the box were her grandmother's ashes. Being able to recover the most cherished of items offered Smith a rare moment of relief amid the storm's devastation. She said her parents and brother were injured during the storm but survived.

"I have thanked God probably a billion times since this happened yesterday," she said. "My kids are healthy and good. We just gotta make back up what we lost."

Travis Wycoff ventured out Tuesday night after seeing on radar that a tornado had touched down in the Portage area, and he said he helped an elderly couple out of their partially collapsed home and freed a service dog from a home.

"There were a lot of people running through the streets trying to find people and their pets," Wycoff said. "It was just a lot of chaos."

In southern Indiana, the National Weather Service confirmed a tornado touched down early Wednesday. The Clark County Emergency Management Agency said the storm damaged 24 structures, including homes in a subdivision north of the city of Sellersburg, located about 12 miles (19 kilometers) north of Louisville, Kentucky.

Candice Holmes, a resident of the Lewis & Clark subdivision north of Sellersburg, said she, her husband and son sought shelter in their bathroom when they heard the approaching storm and "the wind just picked up all at once."

"It was definitely a scary moment. ... And I'm glad we're alive," Holmes told WDRB-TV.

Tornadoes were also confirmed in Pennsylvania just outside Pittsburgh, in central Arkansas and in northern West Virginia. The West Virginia twister was at least the 11th tornado this year in the state, which sees two tornadoes in an average year.

Baseball-sized hail was reported Wednesday in areas just southwest of St. Louis. Heavy downpours caused flash flooding and at least one water rescue near Sullivan, a town that was struck by a small tornado just two days earlier. Damaging hail also was reported in the Kansas City area.

On Monday, parts of the central United States were battered by heavy rain, strong winds, hail and tornadoes, including a deadly twister that ripped through an Oklahoma town. Both the Plains and Midwest have been hammered by tornadoes this spring.

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

Biden administration will propose tougher asylum standards for some migrants at the border

By SEUNG MIN KIM and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration plans to propose a new rule Thursday aimed at speeding up the asylum claims process for some migrants — a potential prelude to broader actions from President Joe Biden later this year that would impose a bigger crackdown at the border.

It's meant to affect migrants with criminal records or those who would otherwise be eventually deemed ineligible for asylum in the United States. The proposal, which the Department of Homeland Security plans to announce on Thursday, was confirmed by four people familiar with its contents who were granted anonymity to detail plans not yet public.

Under current law, a migrant who arrives at the border and undergoes an initial screening for "credible fear" — one criterion for asylum — is allowed to continue with the process even if they have a criminal background or would pose a security risk. A judge would later determine whether that migrant would be eligible for asylum.

The change would effectively let an officer at the initial screening stage make that determination, rather than waiting for a judge, according to the people. The people also said the proposal affects a relatively small universe of migrants and those who would not be qualified to receive asylum protections anyway.

But despite those caveats, immigration advocates have previously raised questions about any changes to the credible fear process, saying that migrants are often doing these interviews immediately after surviving life-threatening perilous trips to get to the U.S.

Because of this, initial interviews are designed to have a relatively lower bar so that migrants aren't wrongfully deported, they say. And they've questioned how much legal help migrants who are in custody can actually get in order to prepare them for this key first step toward an asylum claim.

It will likely be months before Thursday's proposal, which was first reported by Politico, would actually go into effect. Biden continues to mull larger executive action on the border, whose timing depends in large part on whether the number of illegal border crossings increases — they have been steadily decreasing since December.

The proposed rule also comes amid pressure from fellow Democrats and immigrant rights advocates to support immigrants already in the United States.

Janet Murguía, the president of UnidosUS, a civil rights advocacy organization, said she met with Biden last week at the White House with other Latino leaders to push for relief for immigrants who do not have legal status but have been in the United States for years.

"I believe that President Biden is open to this notion that he can do something. He asked for more specifics," Murguía said. "We're going to make the case in the White House. We're going to make the case here in the Capitol, across the country, in every community."

At a news conference Wednesday, Latino and progressive congressional Democrats expressed frustration at the idea that the White House would clamp down on the border without also assisting immigrants who crossed the border illegally as children.

"Mr. President, we know what's in your heart. Let's reject the extremist messaging vilifying immigrants. Let's embrace our values as a nation of immigrants and provide relief for the long-term residents of the United States," said Sen. Alex Padilla, a California Democrat.

The lawmakers are calling for the Biden administration to provide relief from deportation to spouses and other family members of U.S. citizens, as well as extended temporary protected status, which allows people from countries ravaged by disaster and war to live and work legally in the United States.

At the same time, Democrats, especially those in political swing states, are encouraging the White House to take unilateral action to curtail border crossings.

In the Senate, Democrats are considering whether to put a series of border proposals to a vote in order to show that Republicans are opposed to swifter border enforcement. And in the House, 15 Democrats penned a letter to the White House this week encouraging executive actions.

"We need to make sure that we are adjudicating those who are coming across just as quickly as possible, specifically around sort of administrative judges being down at the southern border," said Rep. Angie Craig, a Minnesota Democrat who led the letter. "And I do think there's a limit to the number of people who we can accept into our nation on an asylum claim. At the end of the day, we cannot have a border where an unlimited amount of people can simply cross."

House rejects Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene's effort to remove Speaker Mike Johnson from office

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hardline Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene tried and failed in sudden action Wednesday to oust House Speaker Mike Johnson, her long-shot effort swiftly and resoundingly rejected by Democrats and Republicans tired of the political chaos.

One of Donald Trump's biggest supporters in Congress, Greene stood on the House floor and read a long list of "transgressions" she said Johnson had committed as speaker. Colleagues booed in protest.

Greene criticized Johnson's leadership as "pathetic, weak and unacceptable."

After Greene triggered the vote on her motion to vacate the speaker from his office, Republican Majority Leader Steve Scalise quickly countered by calling first for a vote to table it.

An overwhelming majority, 359-43, kept Johnson in his job, for now.

"As I've said from the beginning, and I've made clear here every day, I intend to do my job," Johnson said afterward. "And I'll let the chips fall where they may. In my view, that is leadership."

It's the second time in a matter of months that Republicans have worked to oust their own speaker, an unheard of level of party turmoil with a move rarely seen in U.S. history.

The tally shows the strengths but also the stark limits of Johnson's hold on the gavel, and the risks ahead for any Republican trying to lead the GOP in the Trump era. Without Democratic help, Johnson would have certainly faced a more dismal outcome.

All told, 11 Republicans voted to proceed with Greene's effort, more than it took to oust then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy last fall, a first in U.S. history. And the threat still lingers — any single lawmaker can call up the motion to vacate the speaker.

Johnson said he hoped it "is the end of the personality politics."

As Greene pressed ahead with the snap vote despite pushback from Republicans at the highest levels, including Trump, GOP lawmakers filtered towards Johnson, giving him pats on the back and grasping his shoulder to assure him of their support.

The Georgia Republican had vowed weeks ago she would force a vote on the motion to vacate the Republican speaker if he dared to advance a foreign aid package for Ukraine, which was overwhelmingly approved late last month and signed into law.

But in recent days it seemed her effort had cooled, as she and Johnson met repeatedly for a potential resolution.

Johnson of Louisiana marched on, saying he had been willing to take the risk to approve the foreign aid, believing it was important for the U.S. to back Ukraine against Russia's invasion and explaining he wanted to be on the "right side of history."

In a highly unusual move, the speaker received a boost from Democrats led by Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, whose leadership team had said it was time to "turn the page" on the GOP turmoil and vote to table Greene's resolution — almost ensuring Johnson's job is saved, for now.

"Our decision to stop Marjorie Taylor Greene from plunging the country into further chaos is rooted in our commitment to solve problems," Jeffries said after the vote.

Trump had also weighed in after Johnson trekked to Mar-a-Lago last month for support, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee giving the speaker his nod of approval. And Trump's hand-picked leader at the Republican National Committee urged House Republicans off the move.

Ahead of House voting, Trump said on social media, "I absolutely love Marjorie Taylor Greene," but he

said Republicans need to be fighting now to defeat Democrats in the November election. He urged Republicans to table Greene's motion.

"At some point, we may very well be, but this is not the time," Trump said, to oust the speaker.

The move now poses its own political risks for Greene, a high-profile provocateur who has moved to the forefront of the party with her own massive following and proximity to Trump.

Greene was determined to force her colleagues to be on the record with their vote – putting them in the politically uncomfortable position of backing the speaker and seen as joining forces with Democrats to save him.

"I'm proud of what I did today," Greene said afterward on the Capitol steps.

While reporters and camera crews crowded around Greene and ally Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., a group of other Republicans gathered on the steps trying to shift the attention away from her and make their own views known.

Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D., said of those trying to remove the speaker, "They're pretty good at getting attention, but they have not been recognized for their ability to get things done."

He said if they keep pushing to oust the speaker, "I think you can expect more of the same: Failure."

Reps. Carlos Giménez, a Florida Republican, said of Greene: "She doesn't represent the Republican Party. I'm tired of of this being the face or the voice of the party and getting attention. That's all she wants, is the attention."

Rep. Mike Lawler, R-N.Y., called for Greene and Massie to be punished for their actions.

Had Democrats not taken the unusual move to help, the vote would most likely have ended differently for Johnson who holds one of the slimmest majorities in the House in modern times, with no votes to spare.

Last year, the House chamber was hurled into chaos when eight Republicans voted to remove McCarthy from the speaker's office and Democrats declined to help save him.

Ousting McCarthy resulted in a nearly monthlong search for a new GOP leader, bringing the chamber to a standstill with an episode Republicans wanted to avoid ahead of the November election.

Police clear pro-Palestinian protest camp and arrest 33 at DC campus as mayor's hearing is canceled

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Police used pepper spray to clear a pro-Palestinian tent encampment at George Washington University and arrested dozens of demonstrators on Wednesday just as city officials were set to appear before hostile lawmakers in Congress to account for their handling of the 2-week-old protest.

The House Committee on Oversight and Accountability canceled the hearing after the crackdown, with its chairman and other Republicans welcoming the police action. House Speaker Mike Johnson said, "it should not require threatening to haul D.C.'s mayor before Congress to keep Jewish students at George Washington University safe."

Mayor Muriel Bowser, a Democrat, said she and Metropolitan Police Chief Pamela Smith decided to clear the camp because of signs that "the protest was becoming more volatile and less stable." Among them were indications that protesters had "gathered improvised weapons" and were "casing" university buildings with the possible intention of occupying them, police said.

But Moataz Salim, a Palestinian student at George Washington who has family in Gaza, said the authorities merely "destroyed a beautiful community space that was all about love."

"Less than 10 hours ago, I was pepper sprayed and assaulted by police," he told a news conference held by organizers. "And why? Because we decided to pitch some tents, hold community activities and learn from each other. We built something incredible. We built something game-changing."

Tensions have ratcheted up in standoffs with protesters of the Israel-Hamas war on campuses across the United States and increasingly in Europe. Some colleges cracked down immediately. Others have tolerated the demonstrations. Some have begun to lose patience and call in the police over concerns about disruptions to campus life and safety.

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Police also moved in Tuesday night to break up an encampment at the University of Massachusetts. Video from the scene in Amherst showed an hourslong operation as dozens of officers in riot gear systematically tore down tents and took protesters into custody. The operation continued into early Wednesday. Police said about 130 people were arrested after protesters refused orders to disperse.

"I found it to be a complete overreaction," said Lucas Ruud, editor-in-chief of The Massachusetts Daily Collegian. "It was a completely unnecessary show of force." The staff of the college newspaper counted more than 100 police vehicles on campus for the crackdown.

In Washington, police said they arrested 33 people at the George Washington protest, including for assault on a police officer and unlawful entry. They confirmed they used pepper spray outside the encampment against protesters who were trying to break police lines and enter.

Two Democratic lawmakers appeared at a news conference with five of the students who had been arrested. "I want all Republicans and Democrats to know that they cannot arrest their way out of this growing dissent," said Rep. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan. "This was an explicit attempt to repress students exercising their First Amendment rights."

Rep. Cori Bush of Missouri said that "those who refuse to stop the genocide in Gaza think they can arrest and brutalize their way out of this."

The school said in a statement that while it is committed to free expression, "the encampment had evolved into an unlawful activity, with participants in direct violation of multiple university policies and city regulations." It said later that normal operations had resumed after the "orderly and safe operation" to disperse the demonstrators.

President Joe Biden's press secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre, said the president believes the right to dissent is "fundamental to who we are, but it cannot lead to disorder and violence, threats, vandalism, trespassing and/or shutting down campuses. Students have the right to be safe, and antisemitism is repugnant, and we've been very clear about that."

Throughout the roughly two weeks of the encampment, the scene had been largely tranquil.

The tightly organized demonstrators and pro-Israeli counterprotesters who stood along the edges interacted without serious conflict. Some of the most charged confrontations involved people objecting to the treatment of a George Washington statue, wrapped with Palestinian scarves and flags with "Genocidal Warmonger University" spray-painted on its base.

Since April 18, about 2,800 people have been arrested on 50 campuses — figures based on Associated Press reporting and statements from universities and law enforcement agencies after this latest anti-war movement was launched by a protest at Columbia University in New York.

At other U.S. schools:

— Student protesters at the University of Vermont ended their nine-day encampment Wednesday. Among their demands, protesters wanted the school to cancel Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, as commencement speaker because of U.S. votes blocking cease-fire resolutions. The school said Friday that Thomas-Greenfield would not give the address.

— A pro-Palestinian tent encampment was cleared by officers in riot gear at the University of Chicago on Tuesday after administrators who initially adopted a permissive approach said the protesters had crossed a line. Hundreds of protesters had gathered for at least eight days until administrators warned them Friday to leave or face removal.

— The president of Wesleyan University, a liberal arts school in Connecticut, commended the on-campus demonstration, which includes a pro-Palestinian tent encampment, as an act of political expression. The camp there has grown from about 20 tents a week ago to more than 100. "The protesters' cause is important — bringing attention to the killing of innocent people," university President Michael Roth wrote to the campus community. "And we continue to make space for them to do so, as long as that space is not disruptive to campus operations."

— The Rhode Island School of Design's president, Crystal Williams, spent more than five hours with protesters discussing their demands after students started occupying a building Monday. On Tuesday the school announced it was relocating classes from the building.

— New York City police arrested 50 people outside the Fashion Institute of Technology on Tuesday evening after protesters who had been rallying nearby arrived to support a student encampment.

In Amherst, school Chancellor Javier Reyes said he ordered the sweep after talks over a wide range of demands failed to yield an agreement to dismantle the encampment and engage in “constructive discussions.”

A week ago, the George Washington encampment was host to a somewhat chaotic visit from several Republican members of the House oversight panel who criticized the protests and condemned Bowser’s refusal at that point to send in police.

“We did not have any violence to interrupt on the GW campus,” she said then.

But in the early hours of Wednesday, hundreds of Metropolitan Police Department officers descended on the scene, reported The GW Hatchet, the university’s student newspaper.

At least two officers deployed pepper spray on protesters, who then set up an impromptu medical area at a nearby market, the paper said. Organizers ran to a convenience store to buy water to rinse their eyes.

The oversight hearing, now scrapped, was another pressure point in the fraught relationship between Republicans in Congress and officials in the heavily Democratic district. Former President Donald Trump has threatened a federal “takeover” of the city, to control crime, if he wins back the White House.

The district is already a federal enclave, though with a measure of self-government and its own police department, over which the federal government can exert control in some emergencies.

Israel says it reopened a key Gaza crossing after a rocket attack but the UN says no aid has entered

By JOSEPH KRAUSS, SAMY MAGDY and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Israeli military said Wednesday that it has reopened its Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza after days of closure, but the U.N. said no humanitarian aid has yet entered and there is no one to receive it on the Palestinian side after workers fled during Israel’s military incursion in the area.

The Kerem Shalom crossing between Gaza and Israel was closed over the weekend after a Hamas rocket attack killed four Israeli soldiers nearby, and on Tuesday, an Israeli tank brigade seized the nearby Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt, forcing its closure. The two facilities are the main terminals for entry of food, medicine and other supplies essential for the survival of Gaza’s population of 2.3 million Palestinians.

The Israeli foray did not appear to be the start of the full-scale invasion of the city of Rafah that Israel has repeatedly promised. But aid officials warn that the prolonged closure of the two crossings could cause the collapse of aid operations, worsening the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where the U.N. says a “full-blown famine” is already underway in the north.

The United States paused a shipment of bombs to Israel last week over concerns that Israel was approaching a decision on launching a full-scale assault on Rafah, in a further widening of divisions between the two close allies. And on Wednesday, President Joe Biden said he would not supply offensive weapons that Israel could use to launch a full-scale assault on Rafah.

Biden, in an interview with CNN, said the U.S. was still committed to Israel’s defense and would supply Iron Dome rocket interceptors and other defensive arms, but that if Israel goes into Rafah, “we’re not going to supply the weapons and artillery shells used, that have been used.”

The U.S. says it is concerned over the fate of around 1.3 million Palestinians crammed into Rafah, most of whom fled fighting elsewhere.

The U.S., Egypt and Qatar are meanwhile ramping up efforts to close the gaps in a possible agreement for at least a temporary cease-fire and the release of some of the scores of Israeli hostages still held by Hamas. Israel has linked the threatened Rafah operation to the fate of those negotiations. CIA chief William Burns, who has been shuttling around the region for talks on the cease-fire deal, met Wednesday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a U.S. official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss closed-door negotiations.

With the seizure of Rafah, Israel now controls all of Gaza’s crossings for the first time since it withdrew

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troops and settlers from the territory nearly two decades ago, though it has maintained a blockade with Egypt's cooperation for most of that time. The Rafah crossing has been a vital conduit for humanitarian aid since the start of the war and is the only place where people can enter and exit. Kerem Shalom is Gaza's main cargo terminal.

The U.N. World Food Program deputy executive director, Carl Skau, told The Associated Press that the agency has lost access to its Gaza food warehouse in Rafah, which he said was "communicated as a no-go zone."

"We understand that it's still there, but we are extremely worried of looting," Skau said during a visit to neighboring Lebanon, adding that a U.N. logistics warehouse in Rafah had already been looted. He said the WFP was able to secure a warehouse in Deir al-Balah, in central Gaza, but has not stocked it with food yet.

Associated Press journalists heard sporadic explosions and gunfire in the area of the Rafah crossing overnight, including two large blasts early Wednesday. On Wednesday afternoon, hospital records showed at least 25 people were wounded after Israeli artillery fire struck a part of central Rafah, an area Israel did not call on Palestinians to evacuate ahead of its operation. The military had no immediate comment.

An Israeli military official said that Hamas had fired unidentified projectiles at Kerem Shalom on Wednesday, confirming an earlier claim from the militant group. There were no immediate reports of serious injuries. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity pending an official announcement, said the attack would make it difficult to continue aid deliveries but that the crossing would reopen Thursday.

COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of Palestinian civilian affairs, said the Kerem Shalom crossing reopened early Wednesday and released video of what it said were aid trucks entering the 1-kilometer-long (half-mile) area of the crossing. The video then showed their cargo being unloaded. Typically, Palestinian drivers from the other side of the crossing must pick up the aid after it is unloaded and drive it to distribution destinations within Gaza. The video did not show the aid being picked up.

Juliette Touma, the director of communications for UNRWA, said no aid had entered as of late afternoon Wednesday and that the U.N. agency had been forced to ration fuel, which is imported through Rafah.

Gaza's Health Ministry meanwhile said at least 46 patients and wounded people who had been scheduled to leave Tuesday for medical treatment have been left stranded.

U.N. agencies and aid groups have ramped up humanitarian assistance in recent weeks as Israel has lifted some restrictions and opened an additional crossing in the north under pressure from the United States, its closest ally.

But aid workers say the closure of Rafah, which is the only gateway for the entry of fuel for trucks and generators, could have severe repercussions, and the U.N. says northern Gaza is already in a state of "full-blown famine."

Skau of the WFP said some food has been delivered to the north in recent weeks.

"When we got up there, people were coming out of the rubble extremely weak, not even able to carry the box of food," he said, adding that an increase in infectious diseases among children could worsen the crisis in the north.

"It's that combination of widespread disease and acute malnutrition that is that deadly cocktail," he said.

COGAT said 60 aid trucks entered through the northern crossing on Tuesday. Some 500 trucks entered Gaza every day before the war.

The war began when Hamas militants breached Israel's defenses on Oct. 7 and swept through nearby army bases and farming communities, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Hamas is still believed to be holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others after most of the rest were released during a November cease-fire.

The war has killed over 34,800 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, and has driven some 80% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million Palestinians from their homes. Israel's military campaign has been one of the deadliest and most destructive in recent history, reducing large parts of Gaza to rubble.

Biden has repeatedly warned Netanyahu against launching an invasion of Rafah. But Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners have threatened to bring down his government if he calls off an offensive or makes too

many concessions in the cease-fire talks.

The U.S. has historically provided Israel with enormous amounts of military aid, which has only accelerated since the start of the war.

The paused shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs and 1,700 smaller ones, with the U.S. concern focused on how the larger bombs could be used in a dense urban setting, a U.S. official said Tuesday on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. The official said no final decision had been made yet on proceeding with the shipment.

Palestinians flee chaos and panic in Rafah after Israel's seizure of border crossing

By WAFAA SHURAF, SARAH EL DEEB and LEE KEATH Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Tens of thousands of displaced and exhausted Palestinians have packed up their tents and other belongings from Rafah, dragging families on a new exodus.

The main hospital has shut down, leaving little care for people suffering from malnutrition, illnesses and wounds.

And with fuel and other supplies cut off, aid workers have been scrambling to help a population desperate after seven months of war.

Gaza's overcrowded southernmost city has been thrown into panic and chaos by Israel's seizure of the nearby border crossing with Egypt and as its possible full-scale invasion of Rafah looms.

Families uprooted multiple times by the war are unsure where to go: to the half-destroyed city of Khan Younis, to points even farther north, or to an Israeli-declared "humanitarian zone" in Gaza already teeming with people with little water or supplies?

The past three days, streams of people on foot or in vehicles have jammed the roads out of Rafah in a confused evacuation, their belongings piled high in cars, trucks and donkey carts. All the while, Israeli bombardment has boomed and raised palls of smoke.

"The war has caught up with us even in schools. There is no safe place at all," said Nuzhat Jarjer. Her family packed on Wednesday to leave a U.N. school-turned-shelter in Rafah that was rapidly emptying of the hundreds who had lived there for months.

Rafah had 250,000 residents before the war. Its population had ballooned to some 1.4 million as people from across Gaza fled there. Nearly every empty space was blanketed with tent camps, and families crammed into schools or homes with relatives. Like the rest of Gaza's population, they have been largely reliant on aid groups for food and other basics of life.

Israel on Monday issued evacuation orders for eastern parts of the city, home to some 100,000. It then sent tanks to seize the nearby Rafah crossing with Egypt, shutting it down.

It remains uncertain whether Israel will launch an all-out invasion of Rafah as international efforts continue for a cease-fire. Israel has said an assault on Rafah is crucial to its goal of destroying Hamas after the militant group's Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel that left 1,200 dead and 250 as hostages in Gaza.

The United States, which opposes a Rafah invasion, has said Israel has not provided a credible plan for evacuating and protecting civilians. The war has killed over 34,800 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, and has driven some 80% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million Palestinians from their homes.

For now, confusion has reigned. Fearing a greater assault, Palestinians fled districts other than the eastern areas they were ordered to leave. Tens of thousands are estimated to have left, according to a U.N. official who spoke on condition of anonymity because agencies were still trying to determine precise figures.

Tent camps in some parts of Rafah have vanished, springing up again further north along main roads. New camps have filled streets, cemeteries and the beach in the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah, 15 kilometers (10 miles) north, said Ghada Alhaddad, who works there with the aid group Oxfam.

Others made their way to Khan Younis, much of which was destroyed in a months-long Israeli ground assault.

Suze van Meegen, head of operations for the Norwegian Refugee Council in Palestine, said the Rafah

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district where she is based “feels like a ghost town.”

The Israeli military told those evacuating to go to a “humanitarian zone” it declared in Muwasi, a nearby rural area on the Mediterranean coast. The zone is already packed with some 450,000 people, according to the U.N. Few new facilities appear to be prepared, despite the military’s announcements that tents, medical centers and food would be present.

The ground is covered in many places with sewage and solid waste, since there are few sanitation facilities, aid workers say. Clean water is lacking and dehydration is a major problem, with temperatures some days already reaching 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 Celsius).

The water quality is “horribly bad. We tested some of the water and the fecal content ... is incredibly high,” said James Smith, a British emergency doctor volunteering at the European General Hospital in nearby Khan Younis. Acute jaundice is rampant — and probably caused by hepatitis, but there are no capabilities to test, he said.

The newly arrived struggle to find tents because of an extreme shortage among aid groups.

Before his family left Rafah to Muwasi, Iyad al-Masry said he had to sell food received from aid groups to buy a tent for the equivalent of nearly \$400.

While setting up the tent, the family smoothed the dirt ground before setting down a cradle to rock an infant in. Al-Masri said he has been searching for water and can’t afford the three shekels — a little less than \$1 — that sellers charge for a gallon of drinking water.

“We want to eat ... We are just waiting for God’s mercy,” he said.

Nick Maynard, a surgeon with Medical Aid for Palestinians who left Gaza on Monday, said two teenage girls who had survivable injuries died last week because of complications from malnutrition.

“They get this vicious cycle of malnutrition, infection, wounds breaking down, more infection, more malnutrition,” said Maynard.

The number of children in Rafah who have lost one or more limbs is “staggering,” said Alexandra Saieh from Save The Children. “These people cannot just pick up and relocate.”

Rafah’s main Youssef al-Najjar Hospital evacuated on Tuesday. Smith said staff and patients rushed out even though they weren’t under evacuation orders because they feared Israeli troops would raid, just as they did hospitals in northern Gaza and Khan Younis, which were left decimated.

Israel claims Hamas used the hospitals for military purposes, an accusation Hamas and Gaza health officials deny.

Israeli tank shells Wednesday hit about 300 meters (yards) from the Kuwaiti Hospital, one of the few facilities still operating, and wounded several children, according to hospital officials.

The closure of Rafah crossing and the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing from Israel has cut off the entry of food, supplies, and fuel for aid trucks and generators. Aid groups warn they have only a few days of fuel before humanitarian operations and hospitals around Gaza begin to shut down.

Israel said Wednesday it reopened Kerem Shalom, which was shut after Hamas mortars killed four Israeli soldiers nearby, but aid groups said no trucks were entering the Gaza side. Trucks let through from Israel must be unloaded and the cargo reloaded onto trucks in Gaza, but no workers in Gaza can get to the facility to do so because it is too dangerous, the U.N. says.

Palestinian workers trying to reach the border crossing Wednesday were shot at, and several were wounded, the Israeli military said. It did not specify who opened fire but said it was investigating. Hamas also shelled in the area of Kerem Shalom on Wednesday, saying it was targeting nearby troops.

The U.N.’s World Food Program has been cut off from its Gaza food warehouse near the Rafah crossing, its deputy executive director Carl Skau said. It procured another warehouse in Deir al-Balah, but it’s empty until crossings reopen, he said.

Van Meegen, of the Norwegian Refugee Council, said without more supplies, “how do we even begin to prioritize the dribble of humanitarian aid we have here when almost every single person is being forced to depend on it?”

Florida deputies who fatally shot US airman burst into wrong apartment, attorney says

By DAVID FISCHER Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Deputies responding to a disturbance call at a Florida apartment complex burst into the wrong unit and fatally shot a Black U.S. Air Force airman who was home alone when they saw he was armed with a gun, an attorney for the man's family said Wednesday.

Senior Airman Roger Fortson, 23, who was based at the Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, was in his off-base apartment in Fort Walton Beach when the shooting happened on May 3.

Civil rights attorney Ben Crump said in a statement that Fortson was on a Facetime call with a woman at the time of the encounter.

According to Crump, the woman, whom Crump didn't identify, said Fortson was alone in his apartment when he heard a knock at the door. He asked who was there but didn't get a response. A few minutes later, Fortson heard a louder knock but didn't see anyone when he looked through the peephole, Crump said, citing the woman's account.

The woman said Fortson was concerned and went to retrieve his gun, which Crump said was legally owned.

As Fortson walked back through his living room, deputies burst through the door, saw that Fortson was armed and shot him six times, according to Crump's statement. The woman said Fortson was on the ground, saying, "I can't breathe," after he was shot, Crump said.

Fortson died at a hospital, officials said. The deputy involved in the shooting was placed on administrative leave pending an investigation.

The woman said Fortson wasn't causing a disturbance during their Facetime call and believes that the deputies must have had the wrong apartment, Crump's statement said.

"The circumstances surrounding Roger's death raise serious questions that demand immediate answers from authorities, especially considering the alarming witness statement that the police entered the wrong apartment," Crump said.

"We are calling for transparency in the investigation into Roger's death and the immediate release of body cam video to the family," Crump said. "His family and the public deserve to know what occurred in the moments leading up to this tragedy."

Crump is a nationally known attorney based in Tallahassee, Florida. He has been involved in multiple high-profile law enforcement shooting cases involving Black people, including those of Ahmaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor, Tyre Nichols and George Floyd.

Crump and Fortson's family plan to speak at a news conference in Fort Walton Beach on Thursday morning.

The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office didn't immediately respond to an email or voicemail from The Associated Press seeking comment about Crump's claims. But Sheriff Eric Aden posted a statement on Facebook Wednesday afternoon expressing sadness about the shooting.

"At this time, we humbly ask for our community's patience as we work to understand the facts that resulted in this tragic event," Aden said.

The sheriff's office said in a statement last week that a deputy responding to a call of a disturbance in progress at the apartment complex reacted in self-defense after encountering an armed man. The office did not offer details on what kind of disturbance deputies were responding to or who called them.

The sheriff's office also declined to immediately identify the responding deputies or their races. Officials said earlier this week that the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the local State Attorney's Office will investigate the shooting.

FDLE spokeswoman Gretl Plessinger told The Associated Press on Wednesday that it is highly unlikely the agency will have any further comment until the investigation is complete.

Fortson was assigned to the 4th Special Operations Squadron as a special missions aviator, where one of his roles as a member of the squadron's AC-130J Ghost Rider aircrew was to load the gunship's 30mm

and 105mm cannons during missions.

Fortson's death draws striking similarities to other Black people killed in recent years by police in their homes, in circumstances that involved officers responding to the wrong address or responding to service calls with wanton uses of deadly force.

In 2018, a white former Dallas police officer fatally shot Botham Jean, an unarmed Black man, after mistaking his apartment for her own. Amber Guyger, the former officer, was found guilty of murder the following year and was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

In 2019, a white former Fort Worth, Texas, officer fatally shot Atatiana Jefferson through a rear window of her home after responding to a nonemergency call reporting that Jefferson's front door was open. Aaron Dean, the former officer, was found guilty of manslaughter in 2022 and was sentenced to nearly 12 years in prison.

Crump has represented families in both cases as part of his ongoing effort to force accountability for the killings of Black people at the hands of police.

"What I'm trying to do, as much as I can, even sometimes singlehandedly, is increase the value of Black life," Crump told The Associated Press in 2021 following the conviction of a former Minneapolis officer in the murder of George Floyd.

Fort Walton Beach is between Panama City Beach and Pensacola in the Florida Panhandle.

NYC real estate developer charged with driving into woman at pro-Palestinian protest

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A New York real estate developer was charged with felony assault after police said he hit a woman with his car during a pro-Palestinian demonstration led by students connected to the Columbia University protest movement.

Reuven Kahane, 57, was arrested Tuesday morning after driving his car into a 55-year-old safety marshal for the protest, according to witnesses and a New York police department spokesperson.

The woman, who was treated at a hospital for minor injuries, was also arrested, but charges of criminal mischief against her and another demonstrator were dropped Wednesday by the Manhattan district attorney. Kahane was released from custody while he awaits trial.

Kahane is related to Rabbi Meir Kahane, the Brooklyn-born founder of the Jewish Defense League, a group that advocated for the removal of Arabs from Israel and orchestrated a string of violent attacks in the U.S. and abroad. Kahane's political party was banned from the Israeli parliament in the 1980s, and the U.S. classified the Jewish Defense League as a terrorist group. He was assassinated in New York in 1990.

Reached by phone on Wednesday afternoon, Reuven Kahane, who lives in the Manhattan neighborhood where the protest took place, declined to comment on the events leading up to his arrest, but he said he had no link to the Jewish Defense League.

"What does my being a distant cousin of someone who passed away 35 years ago have anything to do with this?" he said, describing his politics as "pro-peace."

Police said the arrest followed a verbal dispute started by protesters involved in the demonstration. The vehicle moved during the confrontation, police said, but Kahane is not accused of trying to mow down a group of protesters.

Several students at the scene disputed the NYPD's version of events. They said they were leaving the home of a university trustee, where they had spent the morning picketing and passing out flyers, when Kahane began heckling the protest from inside his car.

They said Kahane tried to drive through a crosswalk where the protesters were walking in a group, prompting one of the volunteer safety marshals, Maryellen Novak, to step in front of the vehicle to block its path.

"I saw her put her hands on the hood of the car trying to stop it," said Ava Garcia, one of the protesters. "The car kept moving, and she was pushed to the hood of the car because it was accelerating. It was

only when she fell to the ground that the car stopped.”

Ha Vu, another safety volunteer, described herself as “scared and shocked” by the scene. “Maryellen jumping in front of the car helped save a bunch of people,” she said.

Police took Kahane into custody, along with Novak and another 63-year-old safety volunteer.

The incident came one week after police stormed Columbia University to end the occupation of a university building and clear an encampment set up by pro-Palestinian student demonstrators.

In a statement, Columbia University Apartheid Divest, a student group affiliated with the encampment, described the altercation as the “latest example of anti-Palestinian violence from Israel to the US.”

Why the US paused the delivery of 2,000-pound bombs to Israel ahead of a possible Rafah attack

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As it targets Hamas’ underground tunnels in Gaza, Israel has relied on powerful 2,000-pound bombs provided by the United States. But now those deliveries are on hold.

The U.S. is pausing a shipment of 1,800 of the bombs, as well as 1,700 500-pound bombs, U.S. officials said. The decision comes as Israel is planning an assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah in an attempt to root out the final elements of Hamas.

With more than 1 million refugees sheltering in Rafah, U.S. officials are concerned the bombs could inflict massive casualties. Human rights groups have long said that Israel’s use of powerful bombs has caused the indiscriminate killings of civilians.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told a Senate panel Wednesday that smaller, more precise weapons are needed for a densely populated area like Rafah.

Still, he made clear the decision wasn’t final.

“We’re going to continue to do what’s necessary to ensure that Israel has the means to defend itself,” Austin said. “But that said, we are currently reviewing some near-term security assistance shipments in the context of unfolding events in Rafah.”

Israel said it was disappointed with the decision, suggesting it was done due to political pressure on President Joe Biden. Some defense experts said the move was largely symbolic but could signal more trouble ahead in the relationship between the U.S. and Israel.

“It’s some kind of diplomatic message to (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu that he needs to take into consideration American interests more than he has over the last few months,” said Itamar Yaar, former deputy head of Israel’s National Security Council. “At least for now it will not impact Israeli capability but it’s some kind of a signal, a ‘be careful.’”

A look at the 2,000-pound bomb and why there’s so much concern about its use in Rafah.

2,000-POUND BOMBS

While the U.S. has dropped 2,000-pound bombs off its aircraft since World War II, current versions date back to the Vietnam War. It’s an air-dropped munition, one that can carry a higher payload because it doesn’t have an engine. It’s one of the larger munitions in the U.S. inventory, said Ryan Brobst, a senior research analyst at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies’ Center on Military and Political Power.

The 2,000-pound bomb has multiple variants — some are designed to penetrate deep, underground targets while others detonate above ground and cause widespread damage. Depending on the variant, and whether the munition is dropped in an open or urban area, its blast radius can be as far as a quarter mile away or a much more confined area.

The bombs are “dumb” or unguided bombs but can be turned into more precise weapons with the addition of Joint Direct Attack Munition kits, or JDAM kits which add a tail fin and navigation.

That added kit enables troops to guide the munition to a target, rather than simply dropping it from a fighter jet onto the ground. The kits make the weapons more precise, but in a densely populated urban environment, a JDAM kit is not going to make much of a difference — a precise hit will still have the reach to kill unintended bystanders.

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U.S. fighter jets, bombers and drones can all fire the JDAMs, and the U.S. began providing the munitions to Ukraine in 2022, a slightly modified version that could be launched from Ukrainian aircraft. After the Oct. 7 attack on Israel by Hamas, the U.S. provided 2,000-pound munitions to Israel to assist in its defense.

And unlike other types of munitions in the U.S. inventory, the military has an ample supply of them, so providing them doesn't involve the same type of stockpile pressures the U.S. has with other more limited munitions like the 155mm artillery rounds.

USE IN GAZA

The Israeli military has said little about what kinds of bombs and artillery it is using in Gaza. But from blast fragments found on-site and analyses of strike footage, experts are confident that the vast majority of bombs dropped on the besieged enclave are U.S.-made. They say the 2,000-pound bombs have killed hundreds in densely populated areas.

Brobst said the 2,000-pound bombs are still needed to assist Israel in striking Hamas' tunnel network in Rafah.

Wes Bryant, a weapons expert and retired American Air Force master sergeant who served on an independent task force for the State and Defense Departments on Israel's use of weapons in Gaza, said that the pause would be a "huge hit" to the Israeli arsenal.

The 2,000- and 500-pound bombs are some of the main munitions used by Israel in its seven-month war campaign, Bryant said.

"They have been burning right through them," said Bryant. He said the munitions are made by major American weapons manufacturers like Raytheon, Northrop, Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics and General Atomics.

THE PERIL FOR RAFAH

A report compiled by the independent task force for the State and Defense Departments last month said U.S. sources informed one of its members that 300,000 munitions had been dropped on or fired in Gaza during the first six months of the war.

It cited "credible" media investigations that in the first month of the Israeli campaign alone, there were at least 500 craters in Gaza consistent with the use of 2,000-pound bombs.

The potential use of 2,000-pound bombs in Rafah, where more than 1 million people have sheltered because they have nowhere else to go, has drawn significant administration concern.

At the hearing, Austin questioned whether the 2,000-pound bomb was the right tool for the Rafah operation.

"It's about having the right kinds of weapons for the task at hand. And a small diameter bomb, which is a precision weapon, that's very useful in a dense, built-up environment," said Austin, "but maybe not so much a 2,000-pound bomb that could create a lot of collateral damage." He said the U.S. wants to see Israel do "more precise" operations.

Israel reacted strongly to the U.S. decision. Its U.N. Ambassador Gilad Erdan called the pause "a very disappointing decision, even frustrating," in an interview with Israeli Channel 12 TV news. He suggested that the move stemmed from political pressure on Biden from Congress, campus protests and the upcoming election.

The Rev. Al Sharpton calls for justice in eulogy for Ohio man who died last month in police custody

By BRUCE SHIPKOWSKI Associated Press

The Rev. Al Sharpton and family members of an Ohio man who died in police custody told mourners at his funeral on Wednesday that they and the community must fight to see that he gets justice.

Sharpton gave the eulogy for Frank Tyson, a 53-year-old East Canton resident, during the service at the Hear The Word Ministries church in Canton. Tyson died April 18 after he was handcuffed and left facedown on the floor of a social club while telling officers he couldn't breathe.

"You can't give us Frank back, but you can do justice for this family," Sharpton said. "This is an assault

on all us ... stand up for the Franks of this word, because if they can get away with what they did to Frank, they'll do it to you."

Tyson's longtime partner, Sabrina Jones, noted that Tyson had been in prison for many years and was released less than two weeks before he died. She and members of his family had worked over the years on efforts to exonerate Tyson, who had long maintained his innocence.

"We only had 13 days with him (after his release) before they took his life away," Jones said during the service, struggling to keep her composure at times. "It's hard, this is hard. I want justice for Frank."

Bodycam video released by police shows Tyson resisted while being handcuffed and said repeatedly, "They're trying to kill me" and "Call the sheriff," as he was taken to the floor.

Tyson, who was Black, was taken into custody shortly after a vehicle crash that had severed a utility pole. Police body-camera footage showed that after a passing motorist directed officers to the bar, a woman opened the door and said: "Please get him out of here, now."

Police restrained Tyson — including with a knee on his back — and he immediately told officers he could not breathe. A recent Associated Press investigation found those words — "I can't breathe" — had been disregarded in other cases of deaths in police custody.

Officers told Tyson he was fine, to calm down and to stop fighting as he was handcuffed facedown with his legs crossed on the carpeted floor. Police were joking with bystanders and leafing through Tyson's wallet before realizing he was in a medical crisis.

Five minutes after the body-camera footage recorded Tyson saying "I can't breathe," one officer asked another if Tyson had calmed down. The other replied, "He might be out."

The two Canton officers involved, who are white, have been placed on paid administrative leave.

Tyson was released from state prison on April 6 after serving 24 years on a kidnapping and theft case and was almost immediately declared a post-release control supervision violator for failing to report to a parole officer, according to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction.

The Ohio Attorney General's Bureau of Criminal Investigation said in a statement last month that its probe will not determine if force was justified and that the prosecuting attorney or a grand jury will decide if charges related to the use of force are warranted.

Lawyers' coalition provides new messengers for Black voter engagement

By AYANNA ALEXANDER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Young Black lawyers and law students are taking on a new role ahead of the general election: Meeting with Black voters in battleground states to increase turnout and serve as watchdogs against voter disenfranchisement.

The Young Black Lawyers' Organizing Coalition has recruited lawyers and law students and is sending them to Michigan, Georgia, North Carolina and Texas to meet with Black voters, aiming to better understand the barriers that the historically disadvantaged voting bloc faces when registering to vote and accessing the ballot.

The recruits are leading educational focus groups with an ambitious goal: restoring fatigued Black voters' faith in American democracy.

"I think what makes us unique is that we're new messengers," said Abdul Dosunmu, a civil rights lawyer who founded YBLOC. "We have never thought about the Black lawyer as someone who is uniquely empowered to be messengers for civic empowerment."

Dosunmu, who shared the coalition's plans exclusively with The Associated Press, said recruits will combat apathy among Black voters by listening, rather than telling them why their participation is crucial. The focus groups will inform "a blueprint for how to make democracy work for our communities," he said.

According to a Pew Research Center report, in 2023, just 21% of Black adults said they trust the federal government to do the right thing at least most of the time. That's up from a low of 9% during the Trump

administration. For white adults, the numbers were reversed: 26% of white adults expressed such trust in 2020, dropping to 13% during the Biden administration.

The first stop on the four-state focus group tour was Michigan in February. This month, YBLOC plans to stop in Texas and then North Carolina. Venues for the focus groups have included barbershops, churches and union halls.

Alyssa Whitaker, a third-year student at Howard University School of Law, said she got involved because she is dissatisfied with the relationship Black communities have with their democracy.

"Attorneys, we know the law," Whitaker said. "We've been studying this stuff and we're deep in the weeds. So, having that type of knowledge and expertise, I do believe there is some level of a responsibility to get involved."

In Detroit, Grand Rapids and Pontiac, Michigan, the recruits heard about a wide variety of challenges and grievances. Black voters said they don't feel heard or validated and are exasperated over the lack of options on the ballot.

Despite their fatigue, the voters said they remain invested in the political process.

"It was great to see that, even if people were a bit more pessimistic in their views, people were very engaged and very knowledgeable about what they were voting for," said another recruit, Awa Nyambi, a third-year student at Howard University School of Law.

It's a shame that ever since Black people were guaranteed the right to vote, they've had to pick "the lesser of two evils" on their ballots, said Tameka Ramsey, interim executive director of the Michigan Coalition on Black Civic Participation.

"But that's so old," said Ramsey, whose group was inspired by the February event and has begun holding its own listening sessions.

These young lawyers are proving the importance of actually listening to varying opinions in the Black community, said Felicia Davis, founder of the HBCU Green Fund, a non-profit organization aimed at driving social justice and supporting sustainable infrastructure for historically Black colleges and universities.

YBLOC is "teaching and reawakening the elements of organizing 101," she said.

The experience also is informing how the lawyers navigate their careers, said Tyra Beck, a second-year student at The New York University School of Law.

"It's personal to me because I'm currently in a constitutional law class," Beck said.

Kahaari Kenyatta, a first-year student also at The New York University School of Law, said the experience has reminded him why he got into law.

"You care about this democracy and civil engagement," Kenyatta said. "I'm excited to work with YBLOC again, whatever that looks like."

Dogs entering US must be 6 months old and microchipped to prevent spread of rabies, new rules say

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — All dogs coming into the U.S. from other countries must be at least 6 months old and microchipped to help prevent the spread of rabies, according to new government rules published Wednesday.

The new rules require vaccination for dogs that have been in countries where rabies is common. The update applies to dogs brought in by breeders or rescue groups as well as pets traveling with their U.S. owners.

"This new regulation is going to address the current challenges that we're facing," said Emily Pieracci, a rabies expert at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention who was involved in drafting the updated regulations.

The CDC posted the new rules in the federal register on Wednesday. They take effect Aug. 1 when a temporary 2021 order expires. That order suspended bringing in dogs from more than 100 countries

where rabies is still a problem.

The new rules require all dogs entering the U.S. to be at least 6 months, old enough to be vaccinated if required and for the shots to take effect; have a microchip placed under their skin with a code that can be used to verify rabies vaccination; and have completed a new CDC import form.

There may be additional restrictions and requirements based on where the dog was the previous six months, which may include blood testing from CDC-approved labs.

The CDC regulations were last updated in 1956, and a lot has changed, Pieracci said. More people travel internationally with their pets, and more rescue groups and breeders have set up overseas operations to meet the demand for pets, she said. Now, about 1 million dogs enter the U.S. each year.

Dogs were once common carriers of the rabies virus in the U.S. but the type that normally circulates in dogs was eliminated through vaccinations in the 1970s. The virus invades the central nervous system and is usually a fatal disease in animals and humans. It's most commonly spread through a bite from an infected animal. There is no cure for it once symptoms begin.

Four rabid dogs have been identified entering the U.S. since 2015, and officials worried more might get through. CDC officials also were seeing an increase of incomplete or fraudulent rabies vaccination certificates and more puppies denied entry because they weren't old enough to be fully vaccinated.

A draft version of the updated regulations last year drew a range of public comments.

Angela Passman, owner of a Dallas company that helps people move their pets internationally, supports the new rules. It can especially be tricky for families that buy or adopt a dog while overseas and then try to bring it to the U.S., she said. The update means little change from how things have been handled in recent years, she said.

"It's more work for the pet owner, but the end result is a good thing," said Passman, who is a board member for the International Pet and Animal Transportation Association.

But Jennifer Skiff said some of the changes are unwarranted and too costly. She works for Animal Wellness Action, a Washington group focused on preventing animal cruelty that helps organizations import animals. She said those groups work with diplomats and military personnel who have had trouble meeting requirements, and was a reason some owners were forced to leave their dogs behind.

Georgia appeals court agrees to review ruling allowing Fani Willis to stay on Trump election case

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A Georgia appeals court on Wednesday agreed to review a lower court ruling allowing Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis to continue to prosecute the election interference case she brought against former President Donald Trump.

The move seems likely to delay the case and is the second time in as many days that the former president has gotten a favorable ruling that could push any future trials beyond the November election, when he is expected to be the Republican nominee for president. A day earlier, the judge in his Florida classified documents case indefinitely postponed that trial date.

Trump and some other defendants in Georgia had tried to get Willis and her office removed from the case, saying her romantic relationship with special prosecutor Nathan Wade created a conflict of interest. Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee in March found that no conflict of interest existed that should force Willis off the case, but he granted a request from Trump and the other defendants to seek an appeal of his ruling from the Georgia Court of Appeals.

That intermediate appeals court agreed on Wednesday to take up the case. Once it rules, the losing side could ask the Georgia Supreme Court to consider an appeal.

Trump's lead attorney in Georgia, Steve Sadow, said in an email that the former president looks forward to presenting arguments to the appeals court as to why the case should be dismissed and why Willis "should be disqualified for her misconduct in this unjustified, unwarranted political persecution."

A spokesperson for Willis declined to comment on the Court of Appeals decision to take up the matter.

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In his order, McAfee said he planned to continue to address other pretrial motions "regardless of whether the petition is granted ... and even if any subsequent appeal is expedited by the appellate court." But Trump and the others could ask the Court of Appeals to stay the case while the appeal is pending.

McAfee wrote in his order in March that the prosecution was "encumbered by an appearance of impropriety." He said Willis could remain on the case only if Wade left, and the special prosecutor submitted his resignation hours later.

The allegations that Willis had improperly benefited from her romance with Wade resulted in a tumultuous couple of months in the case as intimate details of Willis and Wade's personal lives were aired in court in mid-February. The serious charges in one of four criminal cases against the Republican former president were largely overshadowed by the love lives of the prosecutors.

Trump and 18 others were indicted in August, accused of participating in a wide-ranging scheme to illegally try to overturn his narrow 2020 presidential election loss to Democrat Joe Biden in Georgia.

All of the defendants were charged with violating Georgia's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations, or RICO, law, an expansive anti-racketeering statute. Four people charged in the case have pleaded guilty after reaching deals with prosecutors. Trump and the others have pleaded not guilty.

Trump and other defendants had argued in their appeal application that McAfee was wrong not to remove both Willis and Wade, writing that "providing DA Willis with the option to simply remove Wade confounds logic and is contrary to Georgia law."

The allegations against Willis first surfaced in a motion filed in early January by Ashleigh Merchant, a lawyer for former Trump campaign staffer and onetime White House aide Michael Roman. The motion alleged that Willis and Wade were involved in an inappropriate romantic relationship and that Willis paid Wade large sums for his work and then benefitted when he paid for lavish vacations.

Willis and Wade acknowledged the relationship but said they didn't begin dating until the spring of 2022, after Wade was hired in November 2021, and their romance ended last summer. They also testified that they split travel costs roughly evenly, with Willis often paying expenses or reimbursing Wade in cash.

Movie Review: 'Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes' finds a new hero and will blow your mind

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

Fans of the "Planet of the Apes" franchise may still be mourning the 2017 death of Caesar, the first smart chimp and the charismatic ape leader. Not to worry: He haunts the next episode, the thrilling, visually stunning "Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes."

We actually start with Caesar's funeral, his body decorated with flowers and then set alight like a Viking, before fast-forwarding "many generations later." All apes talk now and most humans don't, reduced to caveman loin cloths and running wide-eyed and scared, evolution in reverse.

Our new hero is the young ape Noa (Owen Teague) who is like all young adult chimps — seeking his father's approval (even chimp dads just don't understand) and testing his bravery. He is part of a clan that raises pet eagles, smokes fish and lives peacefully.

That all changes when his village is attacked not by humans but by fellow apes — masked soldiers from a nasty kingdom led by the crown-wearing Proximus Caesar (Kevin Durand, playing it to the hilt). He has taken Caesar's name but twisted his words to become a tyrannical strongman — sorry, strongape.

Unlike the last movie which dealt with man's inhumanity to animals — concentration camps included — ape-on-ape violence is in the cards for this one, including capturing an entire clan as prisoners. Proximus Caesar's goons use makeshift cattle prods on fellow apes and force them to work while declaring "For Caesar!"

Screenwriter Josh Friedman has cleverly created a movie that examines how ancient stories can be hijacked and manipulated, like how Caesar's non-violent message gets twisted by bad actors. There's also a lot of "Avatar" primitive naivete, and that makes sense since the reboot was shaped by several of that

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blue alien movie's makers.

The movie poses some uncomfortable questions about collaborationists. William H. Macy plays a human who has become a sort of teacher-prisoner to Proximus Caesar — reading Kurt Vonnegut to him — and won't fight back. "It is already their world," he rationalizes.

Along for the heroic ride is a human young woman (Freya Allan, a budding star) who is hiding an agenda but offers Noa help along the way. Peter Macon plays a kindly, book-loving orangutan who adds a jolt of gleeful electricity to the movie and is missed when he goes.

The effects are just jaw-dropping, from the ability to see individual hairs on the back of a monkey to the way leaves fall and the crack of tree limbs echoing in the forest. The sight of apes on horseback, which seemed glitchy just seven years ago, are now seamless. There are also inside jokes, like the use of the name Nova again this time.

Director Wes Ball nicely handles all the thrilling sequences — though the two-and-a-half hour runtime is somewhat taxing — and some really cool ones, like the sight of apes on horseback on a beach, a nod to the original 1968 movie. And like when the apes look through some old illustrated kids' books and see themselves depicted in zoo cages. That makes for some awkward human-ape interaction. "What is next for apes? Should we go back to silence?" our hero asks.

The movie races to a complex face-off between good and bad apes and good and bad humans outside a hulking silo that holds promise to each group. Can apes and humans live in peace, as Caesar hoped? "Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes" doesn't answer that but it does open up plenty more to ponder. Starting with the potentially crippling proposition of a key death, this franchise has somehow found new vibrancy.

"Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes," a 20th Century Studios release that is exclusively in theaters May 10, is rated PG-13 for "intense sequences of sci-fi violence and action." Running time: 145 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four.

Trump is in no hurry as he leans into the pageantry of vice presidential tryouts

By JILL COLVIN, LISA MASCARO and ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — As former President Donald Trump remains stuck in the courtroom listening to salacious details of an extramarital sexual encounter he denies, another spectacle is playing out in the background as his vice presidential tryouts get underway.

The dynamic was on full display in Florida over the weekend at a closed-door fundraiser at his Mar-a-Lago club that doubled as an audition featuring a long list of potential running mates. Trump, at one point, invited many of the contenders on stage like contestants in one of his old beauty pageants. The next day several of them, including South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and New York Rep. Elise Stefanik, fanned out across Sunday news shows to sing his praises.

"This weekend, we had 15 people. ... They're all out there campaigning," Trump told Spectrum News 1 Wisconsin on Tuesday. "It might actually be more effective this way because, you know, every one of them thinks they could be chosen, which I guess possibly is so."

The comments demonstrate why Trump is in no rush to pick his potential second-in-command or publicly winnow his choices. For now, the presumptive GOP nominee is happy to revel in the attention as reporters parse his choices and prospective candidates jockey and woo him in an "Apprentice"-style competition.

Trump has said he intends to make an announcement shortly before July's Republican National Convention, as he did when he picked then-Indiana Gov. Mike Pence in 2016.

"In the end, it's up to him. He will intuitively decide who should be his vice president, and he'll listen to everybody up until that moment and then he'll decide," said former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, one of three finalists on Trump's 2016 list.

For candidates, he said, if Trump calls and asks them to speak at a rally, "The correct answer's 'yes.'" But there are limits to their impact.

"Some of them try to audition," Gingrich said, "but I never thought it worked that well."

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For now, according to several people familiar with his thinking, Trump continues to mull a long list of prospects: governors, senators and members of Congress, including some who ran against him and lost. The people spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the fundraiser and private conversations. As Trump mulls his decision, he is watching to see who can raise money, defend him effectively, and perform at political events. He's especially interested in how they come across on television.

Part of what seems to have made the decision harder is that many of the candidates under serious consideration have knocks against them.

Rubio, one potential top contender, could help Trump win over Hispanic voters as well as establishment donors still leery of a second Trump term. But Rubio has a problem: He lives in Florida, the same state as Trump, which would violate the Constitution's 12th Amendment.

Trump himself has raised the issue, including at Saturday's fundraising luncheon, where he said he liked Rubio, according to one of several people present, but noted the issue with his residency, calling it a problem.

Ohio Sen. JD Vance, a friend of Trump's eldest son who has become close with the former president, is also considered a top contender. He impressed Trump allies with a CNN interview last week.

But Trump continues to note that Vance was a critic before he became a supporter — something he mentioned again at the Saturday event before praising Vance as a great senator.

Scott, whom Trump has repeatedly joked is a far better surrogate than a candidate, also has drawbacks. Scott pushed Trump to back a 15-week national abortion ban during the GOP primaries and his selection would draw new attention to something Trump has tried to eliminate as a campaign issue by insisting it should be left to the states.

Those issues could help a candidate like Burgum, a billionaire who has traveled extensively with Trump since he dropped his own presidential bid.

Others have seemed to test the limits of what it takes to be disqualified.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem has faced a media storm since reports emerged that she she wrote about shooting a family dog to death in a book released this week. Noem has also been caught in errors, including falsely claiming that she once met North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un. She has continued to appear in interviews defending her actions, drawing the storyline out for days.

Trump, in his Tuesday interview, continued to praise Noem, who at one point had been considered a top contender, though he acknowledged that "she had a rough couple of days, I will say that."

Noem's star, in fact, had been tarnished before the revelation of her dog killing amid questions about her judgment, including her decision to appear in an infomercial-style video lavishing praise on a team of cosmetic dentists in Texas.

Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders, meanwhile, has also been the subject of negative headlines. A recent audit suggested that her office may have broken the law when it purchased a \$19,000 lectern — a scandal dubbed "lecterngate" by some.

Sanders, who served as Trump's press secretary at the White House, responded with Trumpian defiance, posting a 20-second video on X featuring the blue and wood-paneled lectern. The opening lyrics of Jay-Z's "Public Service Announcement" played in the background and the words "come and take it" appeared on the screen.

Sanders may still face more questions, with an audit of her travel and security records pending. But her unapologetic response reinforced her image as an acolyte of the Trump brand.

"In the Trump era, what used to be a scandal is no longer a scandal and what used to be seen as a liability is not really as much of a liability," said Kevin Madden, who was a senior adviser to former Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney. "Trump has an ability to block out the sun."

Provocative comments that could have been a liability in past election cycles could also be assets for candidates like Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton, who has urged the public to "take matters into your own hands" if they encounter pro-Palestinian protesters blocking traffic.

"Anyone claiming to know who or when President Trump will choose his VP is lying, unless the person is named Donald J. Trump," senior campaign advisor Brian Hughes said in an emailed statement.

Trump continues to maintain publicly and privately that the “most important thing” in a potential pick is whether they would be a good president if called upon — and that he doesn’t think the choice is likely to change the trajectory of the race.

“VPs have never really helped in the election process,” he said Tuesday. “It’s a one-day story, it’s a big story, and then it’s back to work. They want to really know who’s No. 1 on the ticket.”

Fans are following Taylor Swift to Europe after finding Eras Tour tickets less costly there

By LISA LEFF Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Thousands of ride-or-die Taylor Swift fans who missed out on her U.S. concert tour last year or didn’t want to buy exorbitantly priced tickets to see her again found an out-of-the-way solution: Fly to Europe.

The pop star is scheduled to kick off the 18-city Europe leg of her record-setting Eras Tour in Paris on Thursday, and planeloads of Swifties plan to follow Miss Americana across the pond in the coming weeks. The arena where Swift is appearing said Americans bought 20% of the tickets for her four sold-out shows. Stockholm, the tour’s next stop, expects about 10,000 concertgoers from the U.S.

A concert might sound like an odd *raison d’être* for visiting a foreign country, especially when fans can watch the Eras Tour from home via the documentary now streaming on Disney+. Yet online travel company Expedia says continent-hopping by Swift’s devotees is part of a larger trend it dubbed “tour tourism” while observing a pattern that emerged during Beyoncé’s Renaissance world tour.

Some North American fans who plan to fly overseas for the Eras Tour said they justified the expense after noticing that tighter restrictions on ticket fees and resales in Europe made seeing Swift perform abroad no more costly — and potentially cheaper — than catching her closer to home.

“They said, ‘Wait a minute, I can either spend \$1,500 to go see my favorite artist in Miami, or I can take that \$1,500 and buy a concert ticket, a round-trip plane ticket, and three nights in a hotel room,’” Melanie Fish, an Expedia spokesperson and travel expert, said.

That was the experience of Jennifer Warren, 43, who lives in St. Catharines, a city in the Niagara region of Ontario. She and her 11-year-old son love Swift but had no luck scoring what she considered as decently priced tickets in the U.S. Undeterred, Warren and her husband decided to plan a European vacation around wherever she managed to get seats. It turned out to be Hamburg, Germany.

“You get out, you get to see the world, and you get to see your favorite artist or performer at the same time, so there are a lot of wins to it,” said Warren, who works as the director of research and innovation for a mutual insurance company.

The three VIP tickets she secured close to the stage — “I would call it brute-force dumb luck” — cost 600 euros (\$646) each. Swift subsequently announced six November tour dates in Toronto, within driving distance of Warren’s home. “Absolute nose-bleed seats” already are going for 3,000 Canadian dollars (\$2,194) on secondary resale sites like Viagogo, Warren said.

TOUR TOURISM: IS IT REALLY A THING?

Travel and entertainment analysts have spoken of a pent-up consumer demand for “experiences” over material objects since the coronavirus pandemic. Some think the willingness of music lovers to broaden their fandom horizons is part of the same mass cultural correction.

“It does seem like it’s more than a structural shift, maybe a personality transformation we all went through,” said Natalia Lechmanova, the chief Europe economist for the Mastercard Economics Institute.

As Swift hopscotches across Europe, Lechmanova expects restaurants and hotels to see the same boost that Mastercard observed within a 2.5-mile (4-kilometer) radius of concert venues in the U.S. cities she visited in 2023. The U.S. dollar’s strong value against the euro may also increase retail spending on apparel, memorabilia, beauty products and supplies for the friendship bracelets fans exchange as part of the Eras Tour experience, the economist said.

Former college roommates Lizzy Hale, 34, who lives in Los Angeles, and Mitch Goulding, 33, who lives

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in Austin, Texas, already had tickets to see the Eras Tour in L.A. last summer when they decided to try to get ones for Paris, London or Edinburgh, Scotland, too. They saw a Europe concert trip as a makeup for travel plans they had in May 2020 to celebrate Goulding's birthday but had to cancel due to the pandemic.

Goulding managed to secure VIP tickets for one of Swift's three Stockholm shows. He, Hale and two other friends scheduled a 10-day trip that also includes time in Amsterdam and Copenhagen.

"As people who enjoy traveling and enjoy music, if you can find an opportunity to combine the two, it's really special," Hale said.

FOR STOCKHOLM, 120,000 SWIFTIES CAN'T BE WRONG

In Stockholm, 120,000 out-of-towners from 130 countries -- among them 10,000 from the U.S. — are expected to swarm Sweden's capital this month, Stockholm Chamber of Commerce Chief Economist Carl Bergqvist said. Stockholm is the only Scandinavian city on Swift's tour, and airlines added extra flights from nearby Denmark, Finland and Norway to bring people to the May 17-19 shows, he said.

The city's 40,000 hotel rooms are sold out even though prices skyrocketed for the tour dates, Bergqvist said. Concert visitors are expected to pump around 500 million Swedish kroner, or over \$46 million, into the local economy over the course of their stays, an estimate that does not include what they paid for Swift tickets or to get to Sweden, he said.

Houston resident Caroline Matlock, 29, is making friendship bracelets and trying to learn a few words of Swedish as she prepares to see the 3 1/2-hour show in Stockholm. Also on the itinerary: visiting the Scandinavian cities of Oslo and Gothenburg.

The concert is the last night of the trip and Matlock looks forward to interacting with Swifties from other countries: "Americans tend to have a very obsessive culture, especially Taylor Swift-related, so I'm curious if the crowd will be more toned-down."

WILL TOUR TOURISM ENDURE AFTER ERAS?

It remains to be seen if the music tourism trend has legs as long and strong as Swift's and Beyoncé's, and if it will carry over to Billie Eilish, Usher and other artists with world tours scheduled next year. Expedia's Fish thinks other big-name artists in Europe this summer will prove that booking a foreign trip around a concert is catching on.

Kat Morga, a travel consultant based in Nashville, isn't so sure. Morga saw Swift perform in Nashville last year and helped two clients with school-aged children book European family vacations this summer that include seeing Swift in concert. But she thinks the difficulty of navigating ticket purchases through language barriers, currency conversions, international banking regulations and the risk of cancellations will limit the appeal of regular gig getaways.

"I think this is an anomaly," Morga said. "People aren't typically going to build their \$20,000 huge family vacation only because Taylor Swift is there. She's the one-off. She's special."

Booking Holdings CEO Glenn Fogel, whose company operates Booking.com, priceline.com, agoda.com, Kayak and OpenTable, is even less enthusiastic about concert tours as a tourism instigator. The Swift Effect causes a "little blip" when the superstar goes to smaller destinations, but for the worldwide travel industry, "one star touring around does not make a difference," he said.

A scorching, rocky planet twice Earth's size has a thick atmosphere, scientists say

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

DALLAS (AP) — A thick atmosphere has been detected around a planet that's twice as big as Earth in a nearby solar system, researchers reported Wednesday.

The so-called super Earth — known as 55 Cancri e — is among the few rocky planets outside our solar system with a significant atmosphere, wrapped a blanket of carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide. The exact amounts are unclear. Earth's atmosphere is a blend of nitrogen, oxygen, argon and other gases.

"It's probably the firmest evidence yet that this planet has an atmosphere," said Ian Crossfield, an astronomer at the University of Kansas who studies exoplanets and was not involved with the research.

The research was published in the journal Nature.

Super Earth refers to a planet's size — bigger than Earth but smaller than Neptune. The boiling temperatures on this planet — which can reach as hot as 4,200 degrees Fahrenheit (2,300 degrees Celsius) — mean that it is unlikely to host life.

Instead, scientists say the discovery is a promising sign that other such rocky planets with thick atmospheres could exist that may be more hospitable.

The exoplanet 41 light years away is eight times heavier than Earth and circles its star Copernicus so closely that it has permanent day and night sides. A light-year is nearly 6 trillion miles (9.7 trillion kilometers). Its surface is encrusted with magma oceans.

To identify the makeup of its atmosphere, researchers studied Webb Space Telescope observations before and after the planet passed behind its star.

They separated the light emitted from the planet versus its star and used the data to calculate the planet's temperature. There's evidence the planet's heat was being distributed more evenly across its surface — a party trick atmospheres are known for.

Gases from its magma oceans may play a key role in holding its atmosphere steady. Exploring this super Earth may also yield clues to how Earth and Mars might have evolved first with magma oceans that have since cooled, scientists say.

"It's a rare window," said Renyu Hu, a planetary scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, who was part of the research. "We can look into this early phase of planet evolution."

High school students, frustrated by lack of climate education, press for change

By ALEXA ST. JOHN and DOUG GLASS Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Several dozen young people wearing light blue T-shirts imprinted with #teachclimate filled a hearing room in the Minnesota Capitol in St. Paul in late February. It was a cold and windy day, in contrast to the state's nearly snowless, warm winter.

The high school and college students and other advocates, part of group Climate Generation, called on the Minnesota Youth Council, a liaison between young people and state lawmakers, to support a bill requiring schools to teach more about climate change.

Ethan Vue, who grew up with droughts and extreme temperatures in California, now lives in Minnesota and is a high school senior pushing for the bill.

"I just remember seeing my classmates always sweating, and they'd even drench themselves in water from the water fountains," Vue said in a phone interview, noting climate change is making heat waves longer and hotter, but they didn't learn about that in school.

"The topic is brushed on. If anything, we just learn about, there's global warming, the planet's warming up."

In places that teach to standards formulated by the National Science Teachers Association, state governments and other organizations, many kids learn about air quality, ecosystems, biodiversity and land and water in Earth and environmental science classes.

But students and advocates say that is insufficient. They are demanding districts, boards and state lawmakers require more teaching about the planet's warming and would like it woven into more subjects.

Some states and school districts have moved in the opposite direction. In Texas, the board of education turned down books with climate information. In Florida, school materials deny climate change.

"Someone could theoretically go through middle school and high school without really ever acknowledging the climate crisis," said Jacob Friedman, a high school senior in Florida who hasn't learned about climate except for in elective classes. "Or even acknowledging that there is an issue of global warming."

That's bizarre to Friedman, who experienced firsthand when Hurricane Ian closed nearby schools and submerged homes in 2022.

A study conducted after the storm found that climate change added at least 10% more rain to Hur-

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ricane Ian. Experts also say hurricanes are intensifying faster because of the extra greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that are collecting heat and warming the oceans.

"What an unfair reality to have a young person graduate from high school," said Leah Qusba, executive director of nonprofit Action for the Climate Emergency, "without knowing about the biggest existential threat that they're going to face in their lifetime."

Some places are adding more instruction on the subject. In 2020, New Jersey required teaching climate change at all grade levels. Connecticut followed, then California. More than two dozen new measures across 10 states were introduced last year, according to the National Center for Science Education.

Where some proposals require teaching the basic science and human causes of climate change, the Minnesota bill goes further, requiring state officials to guide schools on teaching climate justice, including the idea that the changes hit disadvantaged communities harder.

Some legislators say they've heard from school administrators and teachers who say that goes too far. "What was said to me is: 'Why are we pushing a political perspective, a political agenda?'" Minnesota Rep. Ben Bakeberg, a Republican, said during a House Education Policy Committee hearing in March 2023. "That's a reality."

The bill didn't advance in the 2023 session. Now it hasn't this year either. Supporters say they will try again next year.

Aware of such opposition, some students interested in climate opt to campaign at their schools rather than through the legislative process.

Three years ago, floods destroyed Ariela Lara's mom's village in Oaxaca, Mexico, while they were visiting. Then Lara came home to California and was hit by smoke-filled skies caused by wildfires that pushed thousands to evacuate or be stuck inside for weeks.

Yet despite what she was seeing, Lara felt in school she was only taught about recycling and carbon footprints, a measure of a person's personal greenhouse gas emissions.

So she went to the board of education.

"I had to really think about how I could go to the people in power to really rewrite the curriculum we were learning," Lara said. "It would get so tiresome because for me, I was the one that was really trying to enforce it."

By the time her school offered Advanced Placement Environmental Science, Lara was too senior to enroll in it. AP Enviro does cover climate change, according to the College Board, but it's also more broad.

When targeted efforts don't work, some students feel they're on their own.

For high school junior Siyeon Joo, climate education seems like a no-brainer where she lives in Lafayette, Louisiana, which was hit hard by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and has been affected by several other intense storms and heat waves.

But Joo wasn't exposed to climate change at her public middle school and an educator there once told her it wasn't real.

"I remember sitting in that classroom," the now-16-year-old said, "being really angry that that was the system that was being forced upon me at the time."

It took enrolling in a private school for Joo to learn about these topics. Many students don't have that option.

Experts say climate material could be worked into lessons without burdening schools or putting the onus on students. But much like with legislation, that will take time students say they don't have.

"I was part of these communities that were really just affirming how much is at stake if we don't take action," said Lara, the student in California, recalling how important to her it would have been to receive education about her experiences. "You should be able to go to school and learn about the gravity which the climate crisis is at."

Russia hits Ukraine's power grid with a 'massive' attack on a day marking the WWII defeat of Nazism

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces unleashed a nighttime barrage of more than 50 cruise missiles and explosive drones at Ukraine's power grid Wednesday, targeting a wide area in what President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called a "massive" attack on the day the country celebrates the defeat of Nazism in World War II.

The bombardment blasted targets in seven Ukrainian regions, including the Kyiv area and parts of the south and west, damaging homes and the country's rail network, authorities said. Three people, including an 8-year-old girl, were injured, according to officials.

Russia has repeatedly pounded Ukraine's energy infrastructure during the war that is stretching into its third year and has claimed thousands of lives. By taking out the power, the Kremlin's forces aim to rob Ukrainian manufacturing of its energy supply, especially military plants, and crush public morale.

Russian attacks have damaged nearly half of Ukraine's power infrastructure since the start of the Kremlin's full-scale invasion in February 2022, officials say. The damage is estimated at \$12.5 billion, with \$1 billion inflicted during the past two weeks, according to the chairman of the Ukrainian Parliament's Committee on Energy and Housing Services, Andrii Herus.

The mass barrages also drain Ukrainian air defenses of ammunition as Kyiv's depleted forces await delivery of the latest batch of promised Western military support. Ukrainian officials have been pleading for more NATO-standard air defense systems, such as Patriots.

Zelenskyy noted that Wednesday's attacks occurred on the day that Ukraine observes the end of European fighting in World War II and equated Ukraine's current struggle with that conflict, saying on social platform X that "only a united free world" can stop Russian President Vladimir Putin. Ukraine last year changed the date of the Day of Remembrance and Victory over Nazism to avoid it coinciding with Russia's own Victory Day commemorations on May 9.

Russia pummeled Ukraine's energy infrastructure during the "blackout winter" of 2022-23. In March, it launched a new wave of attacks, one of which completely destroyed the Trypilska power plant near Kyiv, one of the country's biggest.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has framed the attacks as retaliation for Ukrainian long-range strikes on Russian oil refineries. On Wednesday, a Ukrainian attack hit an oil terminal, injuring five workers and starting a fire, Russia-appointed authorities in the partially occupied Luhansk region said.

Russian bombardments, though frequent, have become less regular in recent weeks, and Ukrainian officials suspect Moscow is stockpiling resources ahead of a major battlefield offensive that could come within weeks.

The 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line has changed little since the early months of the war, but Russia has recently made small but steady gains in some areas as Ukraine battles with a lack of manpower and a shortage of weapons.

National electrical grid operator Ukrenergo said facilities were hit in the Vinnytsia, Zaporizhzhia, Kirovohrad, Poltava and Ivano-Frankivsk regions.

Two energy facilities were hit in the Lviv region, which is in the country's far west and distant from the fighting's front lines, according to regional Gov. Maksym Kozytskyi.

DTEK, Ukraine's biggest private energy supplier, said the attack "seriously damaged" equipment at three of its thermal power plants.

The attack was the fifth in the last six weeks targeting the company's facilities, DTEK said. Overall, since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, the company's assets have come under attack nearly 180 times, injuring 51 workers and killing three, it said.

Russia launched 55 missiles and 21 Shahed drones overnight, the Ukrainian air force said. Air defenses downed 39 of the missiles and 20 of the drones, Ukrainian air force commander Mykola Oleshchuk said.

Russian forces also damaged the railway station building and train tracks in Kherson, national railway operator Ukrzaliznytsia said.

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Also Wednesday, five people including three children were injured in an attack that struck an educational facility in northeastern Kharkiv, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said on social media. City Mayor Ihor Terkhov said one of the children was in critical condition.

Today in History: May 9

Nelson Mandela chosen to lead South Africa

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 9, the 130th day of 2024. There are 236 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 9, 1994, South Africa's newly elected parliament chose Nelson Mandela to be the country's first Black president.

On this date:

In 1860, writer J.M. Barrie, the creator of Peter Pan, was born in Kirriemuir, Scotland.

In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson, acting on a joint congressional resolution, signed a proclamation designating the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day.

In 1945, with World War II in Europe at an end, Soviet forces liberated Czechoslovakia from Nazi occupation. U.S. officials announced that a midnight entertainment curfew was being lifted immediately.

In 1951, the U.S. conducted its first thermonuclear experiment as part of Operation Greenhouse by detonating a 225-kiloton device on Enewetak Atoll in the Pacific nicknamed "George."

In 1962, scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology succeeded in reflecting a laser beam off the surface of the moon.

In 1965, Russian-born American pianist Vladimir Horowitz performed publicly for the first time in 12 years with a recital at Carnegie Hall in New York.

In 1970, President Richard Nixon made a surprise and impromptu pre-dawn visit to the Lincoln Memorial, where he chatted with a group of protesters who'd been resting on the Memorial steps after protests against the Vietnam War and the Kent State shootings.

In 1974, the House Judiciary Committee opened public hearings on whether to recommend the impeachment of President Richard Nixon. (The committee ended up adopting three articles of impeachment against the president, who resigned before the full House took up any of them.)

In 1980, 35 people were killed when a freighter rammed the Sunshine Skyway Bridge over Tampa Bay in Florida, causing a 1,400-foot section of the southbound span to collapse.

In 2016, Filipinos went to the polls to elect Rodrigo Duterte, the controversial, tough-talking mayor of Davao city, to be their country's next president.

In 2019, Pope Francis issued a groundbreaking new church law requiring all Catholic priests and nuns to report clergy sexual abuse and cover-ups by their superiors to church authorities.

In 2020, Rock 'n' roll pioneer Little Richard, known for his piercing wail, pounding piano and towering pompadour, died in Tennessee at the age of 87 after battling bone cancer; he had helped shatter the color line on the music charts while introducing Black R&B to white America.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-writer Alan Bennett is 90. Producer-director James L. Brooks is 87. Musician Sonny Curtis (Buddy Holly and the Crickets) is 87. Singer Tommy Roe is 82. Singer-musician Richie Furay (Buffalo Springfield and Poco) is 80. Actor Candice Bergen is 78. Pop singer Clint Holmes is 78. Actor Anthony Higgins is 77. Singer Billy Joel is 75. Blues singer-musician Bob Margolin is 75. Rock singer-musician Tom Petersson (Cheap Trick) is 74. Actor Alley Mills is 73. Actor Amy Hill is 71. Actor Wendy Crewson is 68. Actor John Corbett is 63. Singer Dave Gahan (GAHN) (Depeche Mode) is 62. Actor Sonja Sohn is 60. Rapper Ghostface Killah is 54. Actor Chris Diamantopoulos (dy-uh-MAN'toh-POO'-lehs) is 49. R&B singer Tamia (tuh-MEE'-ah) is 49. Actor Daniel Franzese is 46. Rock singer Pierre Bouvier (Simple Plan) is 45. Actor Rosario Dawson is 45. Rock singer Andrew W.K. is 45. Actor Rachel Boston is 42. TV personality Audrina Patridge is 39. Actor Grace Gummer is 38.