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UpComing Events

Sunday, April 3

- 2 p.m. and 5 p.m., POPS Concert
- 3:30 p.m.: GHS FCA Meeting: "The Chosen" Watch Party at Kim Weber's house, 501 E 16th Ave
- Emmanuel: 9 a.m. Worship with communion, 10:15 a.m. Sunday school, 10:15 a.m. 1st Communion Class, 7 p.m., Choir
- St. John's: 8 a.m. Bible Study, Worship with communion at 9 a.m. at St. John's and 11 a.m. at Zion, 10 a.m. Sunday School
- United Methodist: Communion Sunday. Conde worship, 9 a.m.; Groton worship, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 10 a.m.
- Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

Monday, April 4

- United Methodist: Missions Meeting, 10 a.m.; Pastor Brandon Lent Study, 7 p.m.
- Emmanuel: 6:30 a.m.. Bible Study
- School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.
- School Lunch: Cheese sticks, marinara sauce,

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WALT WHITMAN



corn.

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, boiled potato, squash, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Tuesday, April 5

- United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.: Pastor Brandon Lent Study in Conde, 6 p.m.
- Catholic: Turton Mass, 5 p.m.
- 7 p.m.: City Council Meeting
- St. John's: 1 p.m.: Ladies Aid LWML
- School Breakfast: French toast sticks.
- School Lunch: Tangereine chicken, rice.
- Senior Menu: Hamburger with bun, oven roasted potatoes, mixed vegetables, fruit, ice cream sundae.

Truss Pros Help Wanted

Truss Pros in Britton is looking to hire a CDL driver to deliver trusses in the tri-state area. Home every night. Competitive wage! Full benefit package!

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Groton Robotic Teams Earn Spot at National Competition April 7-9.

Congratulations to G-Force-(Travis Townsend, Jace Kroll) and Gear Heads (Jack Dinger, Ethan Clark and Axel Warrington) for earning their way to the Us Open in Council Bluffs, Iowa! In order to earn an invitation they have to either receive an award OR win a tournament.

The main national VEX robotics competition filled up fast this year and, unfortunately, by the time our two teams received their invitation to the event it was filled as they only invite 110 teams across the nation. To put this in perspective, South Dakota alone has roughly 32 Vex Robotic teams.

Our next option was to compete in the US Open Create. Teams from across the world are invited to this unique event that spans all ages with four different games/challenges played in six distinct tournaments, including drones and other robotic versions of creativity. Slightly different, but our teams will still get to compete with their robots in the same game they have been participating in all year.

Please visit- <https://www.create-found.org/RoboticChampionship.php> for more information about the event we are attending and to explore the other areas of robotic creativity across the nation!

A heartfelt THANK YOU to all that have supported Groton Robotics by donating or being a part of our fund-raising events! We are so appreciative as our program is mostly funded by donations and fundraising events.

For more information check out the Vex VRC robotics website, download the VEX via app and follow Groton Tiger Robotics on Facebook. STAY TUNED for further updates from the US OPEN in Council Bluffs, Iowa!

Submitted by Groton Robotics



Tournament champions in Sioux Falls Saturday, February 12th! G-Force (Seniors Travis Townsend and Jace Kroll) (Courtesy Photo)



Tournament champions in Valley City, ND Saturday, January 29th! Gear Heads (Axel Warrington, Jack Dinger and Ethan Clark) (Courtesy Photo)

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SDSU women's basketball overwhelms Seton Hall on way to WNIT championship

Matt Zimmer, Sioux Falls Argus Leader

BROOKINGS – Seton Hall never knew what hit them.

By the time Saturday's WNIT championship rolled around, South Dakota State's sixth consecutive home game within this tournament had been hyped to such a degree that there was no way the Pirates could've been unprepared for the sellout Frost Arena crowd of 5,263, or the noise and constant heckling they brought from the opening tip.

But it sure looked like they wanted no part of it.

South Dakota State, on the other hand, played like there was nowhere they'd rather be, crushing the Pirates 82-50 to capture the first WNIT championship in school history, in what was the biggest blowout in WNIT history.

Reaction: SDSU women's basketball fans celebrate WNIT Championship dominance: 'Is there a mercy rule?'

The Jackrabbits, who end the year 29-9, dominated for the duration, using a 16-0 first quarter run to build a 20-point lead that Seton Hall seemed disinterested in threatening. The Pirates made just 3-of-17 shots in the first quarter and didn't much warm up from there, and the Jacks got to just about every miss and every loose ball, sustaining an absurd rebounding advantage that kept them well in front even when their own shots weren't falling.

It was 25-7 after a quarter, 40-18 at halftime, and Seton Hall never got the deficit under 20. It went as high as 37.

The Jacks rolled through this tournament, beating Ohio, Minnesota, Drake, Alabama and UCLA before blowing the doors off the Pirates, but in Thursday's semifinal against the Bruins, the Jacks, at times, looked a little tight, as though the realization of what they were on the cusp of doing had finally occurred to them.

But there would be no nerves in the championship. When the players began arriving at Frost Arena and saw a line of hundreds of fans waiting for the doors to open, they recognized it was going to be their day.

"It's hard not to be excited for a game like this," said Myah Selland, who had 12 points, 11 rebounds and five assists in the win. "I mean, you saw the line to get in here, our fans beat me to the gym. We felt that. We sensed that. Jackrabbit Nation was excited and we were excited and wanted to make the most of it."

Seton Hall felt it, too. Selland said a Pirates player asked her at one point during the game if Saturday's crowd was typical. During this tournament, it was. And that played a huge role in the championship.

Athletic director Justin Sell credited president Barry Dunn for stepping up in the bidding process, pointing out that since the school made money with each game, they could take that cash and put it towards the next round's bid. Sell didn't have an official number of what the school ultimately spent, but said they bid between three and five times the standard rate in the later rounds.

Turns out it pays to have fans that care about women's basketball, and the WNIT. Don't expect any apologies from anyone on the SDSU side about the edge their fans gave them.

"Our fans were amazing, just amazing," said coach Aaron Johnston. "When you can't communicate on the floor, when you can't hear someone 10 feet away from you – that's loud. That advantage is remarkable."

With the fans doing their part, Johnston's players did the rest.

Kallie Theisen was phenomenal off the bench, contributing 16 points, 11 rebounds and three assists in only 17 minutes. Haleigh Timmer had 14 points and five boards and Paiton Burckhard 13 points and seven rebounds. Tori Nelson added 11 points and senior Tylee Irwin had seven points, six rebounds and three assists in her final game.

The Jacks held Seton Hall (24-13) to 27 percent shooting, and their rebounding advantage – 57-32, was so pronounced it had to embarrass the Pirates. SDSU outscored Seton Hall 40-20 in the paint and 20-6 on second chances. Their leading scorer, Lauren Park-Lane, was 0-for-12 from the floor, netting all eight

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of her points at the line.

"We defended really well in the first quarter, but more than that it was just leaning on each other, lifting each other up and making each other better," said Selland, who was named tournament MVP. "We've done that all year and we just leaned into that for the last game."

The Division I women's national championship will be played Sunday night, between South Carolina and Connecticut. That caps off the tournament SDSU wanted to be playing in. Everyone knows that. But that doesn't mean winning the WNIT is easy, or meaningless. USD won it in 2016, and it propelled a burgeoning program forward. SDSU is already one of the strongest mid-majors in the nation, and Johnston expects this win to boost them into next season. But the win is more about validating this year's team. Rewarding their resolve, and their ability to bounce back from the disappointment of losing to their rivals in the conference tournament, then wonder what might have been as they watched the Coyotes reach the Sweet 16.

"This team just really valued each other so much," Johnston said. "Every team says they're a family, but this team really brought out the best in each other. We got over the disappointment of a loss in the conference tournament and instead of sulking and pouting we lifted each other up. Every time we took the floor in this tournament our team was focused on bringing out the best in each other."

This article originally appeared on Sioux Falls Argus Leader: SDSU Jackrabbits beat Seton Hall for first WNIT championship

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THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve.

1 Corinthians 15: 3-5

Detail of "The Resurrection" by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)



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BIBLE TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

1. Is the book of Iscariot in the Old Testament, New Testament or neither?
2. From Matthew 28:2, who rolled back the stone from the door of Jesus' tomb and sat upon it? *Simon, An angel, Villagers, Disciples*
3. When Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" came upon the risen Jesus, who did He ask them to inform? *Priests, Disciples, No one, Villagers*
4. From John 20, which disciple doubted Jesus had risen unless he could see the wounds? *Peter, Andrew, Thomas, Thaddeus*
5. How long did Jesus remain after His resurrection before He ascended into heaven? *Instantaneously, 1 hour, 7 days, 40 days*
6. According to the apostle Paul, above what number saw the risen Christ at one time? *100, 300, 500, 1000*

ANSWERS: 1) Neither; 2) An angel; 3) Disciples; 4) Thomas (called Didymus); 5) 40 days (Acts 1:3); 6) 500 (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

Sharpen your understanding of scripture with Wilson's Casey's latest book, "Test Your Bible Knowledge," available in bookstores and online.

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by Healthy Exchanges

Lemon Supreme Pie

This recipe can be prepared with such ease, you'll be able to join in the Easter egg hunt and still have dinner on the table on time.

- 1 (9-inch) refrigerated unbaked piecrust
- 1 (4 serving) package sugar-free vanilla cook-and-serve pudding mix
- 1 (4 serving) package sugar-free lemon gelatin
- 1 1/4 cups water
- 1 (8 ounce) package fat-free cream cheese
- 1 cup reduced calorie whipped topping
- Sugar substitute to equal 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon coconut extract
- 2 tablespoons flaked coconut

1. Preheat oven to 450 F. Place piecrust in a 9-inch pie plate and flute edges. Prick bottom and sides with a fork. Bake 9 to 11 minutes or until crust is lightly browned. Place pie plate on wire rack and cool completely.

2. Meanwhile, in a medium saucepan, combine dry pudding mix, dry gelatin and water. Cook over medium heat until mixture thickens and starts to boil, stirring often. Place saucepan on wire rack and let set 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

3. After both piecrust and filling have cooled, in a medium bowl, stir cream cheese with a spoon until soft. Stir in 1/2 cup whipped topping, sugar substitute and coconut extract. Spread cream cheese mixture evenly into piecrust.

4. Fold remaining 1/2 cup whipped topping into pudding mixture. Spread pudding mixture evenly over cream cheese mixture. Sprinkle coconut evenly over top. Refrigerate at least 1 hour. Cut into 8 pieces.

* Each serving equals: 179 calories, 7g fat, 5g protein, 24g carb., 362mg sodium, 1g fiber; Diabetic Exchanges: 1 Starch, 1 Fat, 1/2 Meat.

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FFLASH, VULTAN AND THUN ARE ROUSED FROM THEIR DRUG-INDUCED SLUMBER.

UP, RABBLE, YOU HAVE BEEN SUMMONED BY THE EMPEROR!

ZASK

EMPEROR..? WHAT IN BLAZES?!

MING...

FLASH GORDON

By JIM KEEFE

3-27

BRING FORTH THE CAPTIVES AND CHAIN THEM TO THE CENTER OF THE ARENA!

CHAIN..?! YOU FIEND! THEY'LL HAVE NO WAY TO DEFEND THEMSELVES!

IT APPEARS MING MEANS TO SUBJECT US TO TRIAL BY COMBAT.

AND HE'S NOT TAKING ANY CHANCES ON US SURVIVING!

Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS

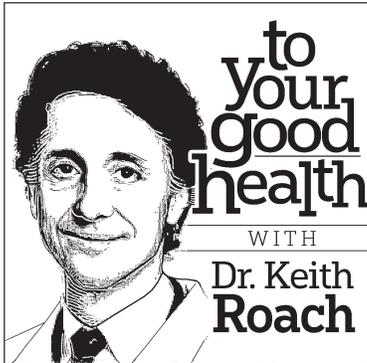
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Her Lack of Perspiration Has Reader in a Sweat



DEAR DR. ROACH: I am an elderly woman who has never perspired and would like to know why. Heat makes me very sick. I love the outdoors, but can be out only a short while in the warmer weather. No one seems to have an answer for me. -- P.M.

ANSWER: The name for the condition of no sweating at all is anhidrosis, and there are several causes. There are rare conditions people are born with. These are a possibility, since you have never perspired. However, nearly all of these rare diseases have other significant symptoms you don't mention.

Damage to sweat glands can be seen in autoimmune diseases and diseases that can destroy sweat glands. None of these is likely, as they too have additional symptoms you would have identified during your life. Likewise, you

don't mention medications, which may have lack of sweating as a side effect.

I suspect you don't have a diagnosable disease but rather that you are on the far end of the normal range for sweating (this would be called hypohidrosis). Just as there are people who get drenched with sweat in mildly warm weather, there are some who sweat very little.

Since sweating is a major way of keeping cool, you are at higher risk for heat injury, including heatstroke. Avoiding hot weather, as it sounds like you've done, is wise. Sun protection (e.g., wearing a wide-brimmed hat) is also wise, as is making sure you have enough fluids. Avoiding excess heat becomes even more important as you get older, since an older person has less ability to adapt to heat than a younger person.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I have had excessive sweating for the past few years. I don't mean underarms; I mean head and face. In warmer weather, my hair will be soaking wet in no time. My doctor thinks it's related to the anxiety syndrome I have had since I was a small child, and prescribed nortriptyline 10 mg once daily. When I looked it up, I thought it might be a little dangerous for me. I am 79 years old.

I am very healthy otherwise. I hope you can help. It's a horrible problem, and it ruins my summers. -- J.H.

ANSWER: We use the Greek terminology to define this problem: primary focal hyperhidrosis, specifically craniofacial hyperhidrosis. "Primary" because it isn't associated with any other known problem; "focal" because it is in one area; "craniofacial" meaning "head and face"; and "hyperhidrosis" just means "too much sweat." The underlying cause is unknown, but your doctor might be right that anxiety is playing a role. However, it may run in families.

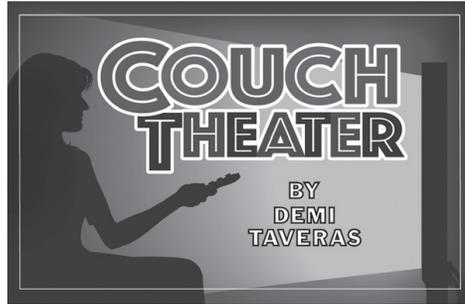
I disagree with nortriptyline in most people. Not only is it not a good treatment for anxiety, it may have excess sweating as a side effect, but the very low dose makes that unlikely. Doses for depression are often 300 mg.

The usual first treatment is topical antiperspirants to the affected areas. If over-the-counter treatments don't work, then prescription strength (20%) aluminum chloride hexahydrate can be tried, although it can be irritating to the skin of the face in some people. Other treatments include a different topical treatment called glycopyrrolate, botulinum toxin (Botox) injection and oral medications like oxybutynin. In people in their 70s and 80s I try not to use the oral agents.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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Trivia Quest (TV-G) — Do you, like me, remember the first day you downloaded the game Trivia Crack on your phone? It was an app that took over instantaneously, and everyone would take out parts of their day to play the game and try to beat their friends by answering challenging trivia questions from a range of different topics. Well, now you can play the game on a different platform — your television! Netflix just premiered the new interactive series “Trivia Quest” that maintains a similar format to the original game by having viewers answer questions via their remote. They can earn points as well as help Willy to save his friends from the evil bad guy, Rocky. (Netflix)

The Invisible Pilot (NR) — A new three-part documentary series dives into the mystery behind the life of pilot Gary Betzner. His career began in crop-dusting, and he was regarded as one of the best pilots in his Top Gun program, walking away from a whopping 11 crashes during his lifetime. He was also a father and a husband. One day, when Betzner was driving with his family, the car broke down on a bridge and, suddenly, he made the decision to jump off the bridge. His small-town Arkansas community searched for his body in vain, and years later his hidden double life as an international drug smuggler became unraveled for the public to see. And that’s just the beginning. “The Invisible Pilot” hails from Academy-nominated executive producer Adam McKay. (HBO Max)

The Outlaws (TV-MA) — From the creator of “The Office,” this new

British crime thriller/comedy series has just premiered on Amazon Prime. Seven people who have committed minor crimes are forced by the court to come together for a community project in order to pay their dues to society. The project includes restoring an abandoned, run-down building and transforming it into a community center. But these seven people couldn’t be more different: a cheeky old-timer (Christopher Walken), an oddball lawyer, a socialite, a left-wing activist, a right-wing businessman, a “seemingly harmless” young man, Ben, and a young woman, Rani. With such a handful of personalities, surely nothing’s bound to go awry. Right? (Amazon Prime)



Courtesy of HBO

Promo for “The Invisible Pilot”

Slow Horses (NR) — River Cartwright, a British MI5 agent who botched a mission, is sent to the Slough House — basically where the “screw-ups” go. The Slough House, headed by the notorious Jackson Lamb (Gary Oldman), consists of agents completing boring and useless tasks with no sign of excitement in sight. River is miserable, until a hostage gets taken in nearby Regent’s Park. As the situation unfolds, River and the other agents in the Slough House are dying to get involved with the action ... and perhaps bring some redemption to the Slough House name. (AppleTV+)

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FLASH BACK POP, ROCK & SOUL TRIVIA BY MICK HARPER

1. Who was Max B. Yasgur?
2. Dickie Lee, Clarence Carter and the duo Dala all released songs with the same name. What was it?
3. Name the group that released "Love or Let Me Be Lonely."
4. Who released "Saved by the Bell"?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "There goes my baby with someone new, She sure looks happy, I sure am blue."

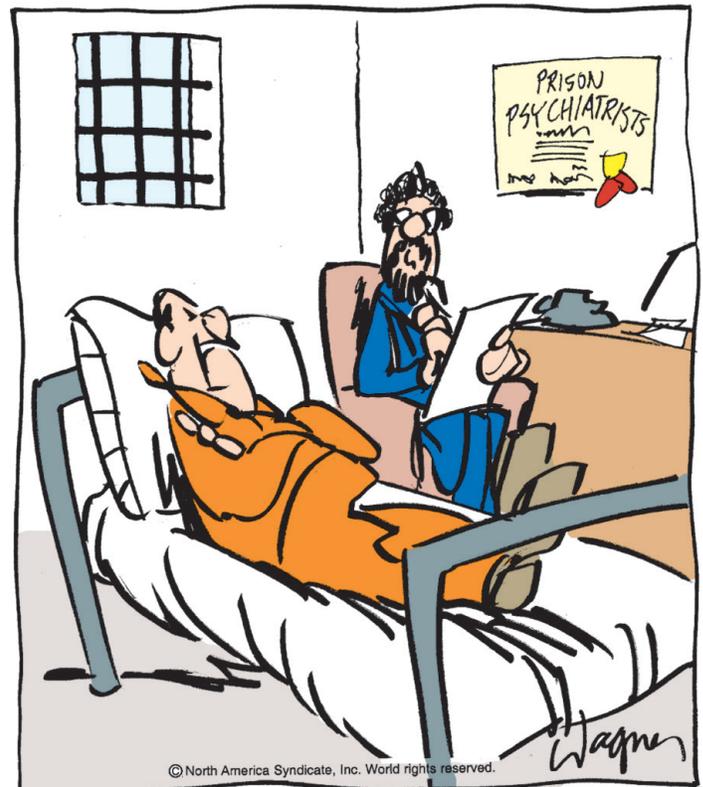
Answers

held that he was no longer welcome in the area. He sold the farm two years later.

1. He owned the farm in Bethel, New York, where the Woodstock music festival was held in 1969. The town was so furious that he was allowing the festival to be
2. "Patches" by Dickie Lee in 1962, Clarence Carter in 1970 and Dala in 2005.
3. The Friends of Distinction, in 1970. The song did well on all the charts: Hot 100, Adult Contemporary and R&B.
4. Robin Gibb, in 1969 on his debut album.
5. "Bye Bye Love," by the Everly Brothers in 1957. The song is considered their debut. Others have covered the song, including the Beatles and Simon & Garfunkel. Rolling Stone magazine included it on its list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time.

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GRIN and BEAR IT ^{Wagner}



"Someone stole my identity, and I wasn't myself!"

Just Like Cats & Dogs ^{by Dave T. Phipps}



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HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Sail is different. 2. Pocket is different. 3. Headline is different. 4. Glasses are missing. 5. Umbrella is missing. 6. Camera is missing.

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• A garden manicure is what my mother calls it: When working with plants and dirt, rake your nails across a bar of soap. The soap prevents dirt particles from lodging under nails, and the soap washes away easily when you are finished. Happy Gardening! —*JoAnn*

• “If you have a spade with a long handle, you can transfer common measurements to the handle. Just lay a tape measure alongside the handle, and use a black marker to note common spacing, like feet and inches. Then, when you put in plants, you can check quickly whether they are spaced correctly. Very handy!” —*P.E. in Arkansas*

• “Garden tool storage doesn’t have to be hard. Fill a wide mouth bucket with clean sand. Add a half quart or motor oil and stir. Then use the sand to clean and store your garden tools like shovels, rakes or hoes. The sand/oil mixture helps clean the metal surfac-

es, and the heaviness of the container lets you stick them in the sand without fear of everything falling down, like it would if you leaned them along a wall.” —*E. in North Carolina*

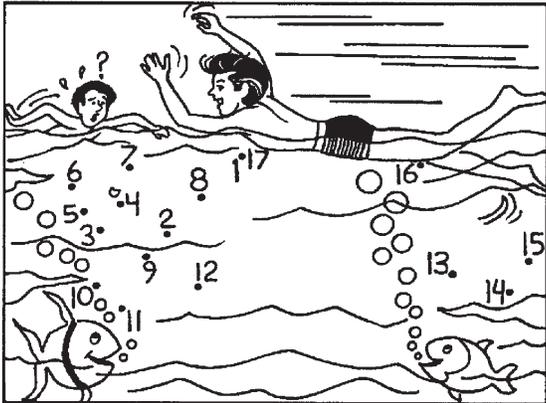
• Here’s a recipe for a quickie bird feeder or bath: Flip over a nice-size flower pot, and place the pot’s tray on the top. Fill with seed or water. The birds will thank you — maybe even by eating some nuisance bugs along with the seed.

• If the string on your trimmer is always breaking or jamming, try this old trick: Give the coiled string a spray with vegetable oil before you thread it. It lubricates the line, making it less likely to pull and less likely to break.

Send your tips to Now Here’s a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

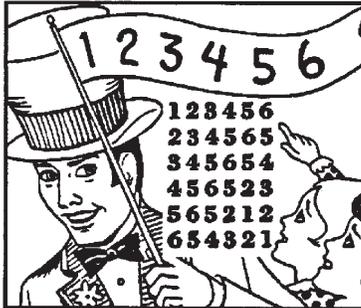
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Junior Whirl

by Hal Kaufman



1-TO-6 SEQUENCE COUNTDOWN

LOOK over the systematic arrangement of numbers 1 to 6 at left. Then see if you can determine in how many different ways you can find 1 to 6 in order, moving up or down, to right or left, but not diagonally.

Each 1-6 run must differ. That is to say, each six-some must be traced out in a varying path to include at least one new number.

Perhaps you lack the patience to make an actual count. If so, take a guess instead.

Check answer below.
 Answer: Would you believe fifty-six different ways?

SHIRT SHRIFT! Say fast: Every single tie-dye-treated two-toned T-shirt shrunk.

SWIM PARTY! A missing figure is needed to complete this swim scene. To complete picture, simply draw dot to dot.

WEIGH FARE! It seems that if Lorna weighs less than Fran, and Hazel weighs as much as Lorna, and Sue weighs more than Fran, then Hazel weighs less than Sue. True or false?

Statement is true.

PAIR GAME! A dozen words shown in the diagram at right are to be paired to form just six words (of varying lengths) having two syllables each. Words at left are to precede words at right in the new words formed.

A way to avoid confusion in solving this poser is to start with first word in the first column, find a compatible word in the second column and draw a connecting line to the second word. Do the same with next word, etc.



Word combos: Standstill, sparring, skylark, sidewall, bantam and attract will comply.

TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



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King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Justice Dept. agency
- 4 Physician's nickname
- 7 Grating
- 12 Vintage
- 13 Away from WSW
- 14 Mountain crest
- 15 Set afire
- 16 Yosemite peak featured in "Free Solo"
- 18 "CSI" evidence
- 19 Dewy
- 20 Billboard
- 22 Swiss peak
- 23 Bloke
- 27 Author Fleming

1	2	3		4	5	6		7	8	9	10	11
12				13				14				
15				16			17					
18				19								
20			21		22				23	24	25	26
			27	28			29	30				
31	32	33						34				
35					36		37					
38					39	40			41	42	43	44
				45				46		47		
48	49	50	51							52		
53							54				55	
56								57				58

- 29 Abrasion
- 31 Planet circlers
- 34 Heart line
- 35 Coffeehouse bill collector
- 37 L-P link
- 38 Utah ski resort
- 39 "Yoo- —!"
- 41 Pottery oven
- 45 Quotable Yogi
- 47 Eastern path
- 48 Bygone Cadillacs
- 52 Copper head?
- 53 Tierney of "The Affair"
- 54 Superlative
- 55 Texter's chuckle
- 56 Velocity
- 57 Irish actor Stephen
- 58 Decade parts (Abbr.)
- 7 Engrossed
- 8 "Exodus" hero
- 9 Fixed
- 10 Sch. org
- 11 Hankering
- 17 Nile vipers
- 21 Martial arts warrior
- 23 Swindler
- 24 Guffaw syllable
- 25 Suitable
- 26 Green shade
- 28 Simile part
- 30 Paint container
- 31 1959 Kingston Trio hit
- 32 Texas tea
- 33 Choose
- 36 Mother of Zeus
- 37 Gloomy
- 40 Sequence
- 42 Tuscany setting
- 43 Hard work
- 44 Seasonal songs
- 45 Thin nail
- 46 Nick and Nora's dog
- 48 Ambulance initials
- 49 Napkin's place
- 50 Payable
- 51 Mine material

DOWN

- 1 Creates origami
- 2 Russian pancakes
- 3 Luggage attachment
- 4 Consider
- 5 Borrowed
- 6 Director DeMille

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— King Crossword —

Answers

Solution time: 26 mins.

F	B	I		D	O	C		R	A	S	P	Y
O	L	D		E	N	E		A	R	E	T	E
L	I	T		E	L	C	A	P	I	T	A	N
D	N	A		M	O	I	S					
S	I	G	N		A	L	P		C	H	A	P
				I	A	N		S	C	R	A	P
M	O	O	N	S				A	O	R	T	A
T	I	P	J	A	R		M	N	O			
A	L	T	A		H	O	O		K	I	L	N
				B	E	R	R	A		T	A	O
E	L	D	O	R	A	D	O	S		A	B	E
M	A	U	R	A		E	S	T		L	O	L
S	P	E	E	D		R	E	A		Y	R	S

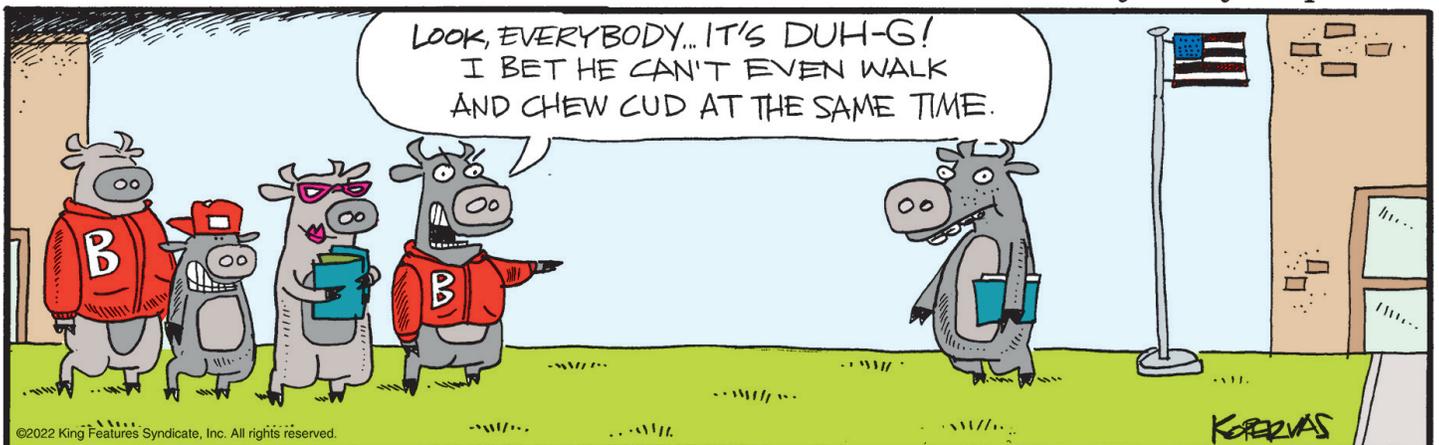
LAFF - A - DAY



"Otis, what's this I hear about your leaving us for a ranch-type home?"

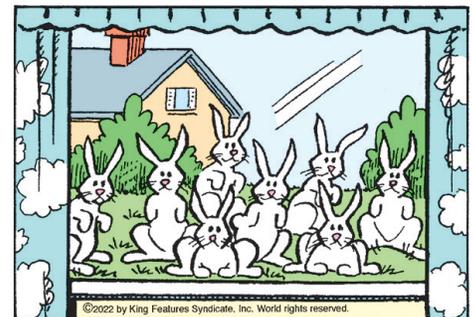
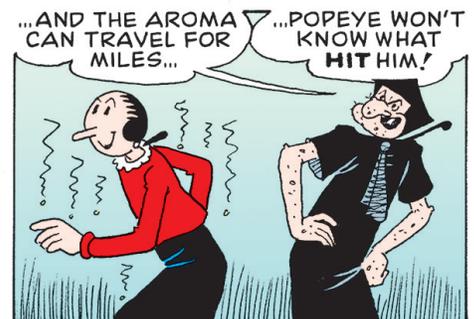
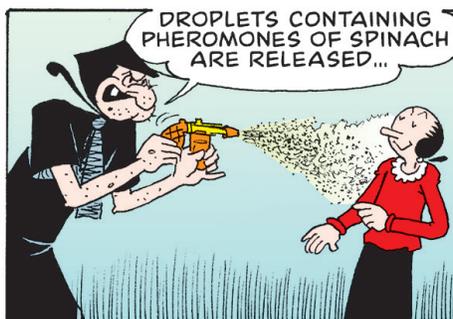
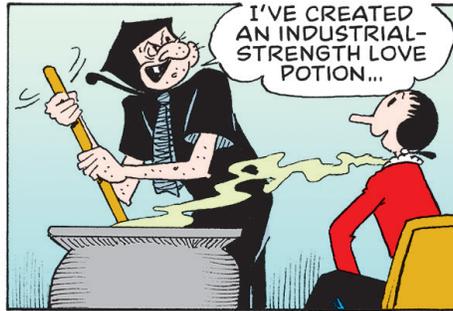
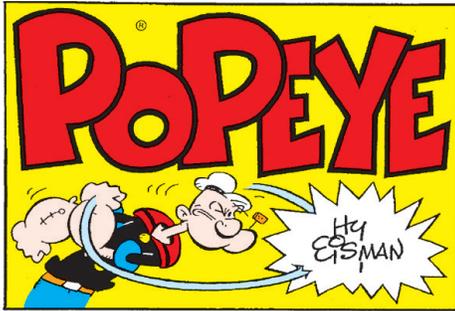
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



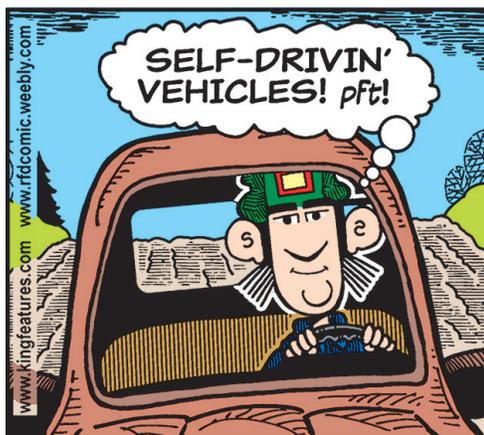
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R.F.D.

by Mike Marland



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Prince Valiant
BY GIANNI AND SCHULTZ

ALETA REVEALS TO THE DUMBSTRUCK VAL THAT MALDUBH CONDUCTS A SORCEROUS WAR ON THEIR FAMILY. OUT ON THE HEATH, BEYOND CAMELOT'S WALLS, THAT VERY WIFE OF DRACO CONJURES ANEW.

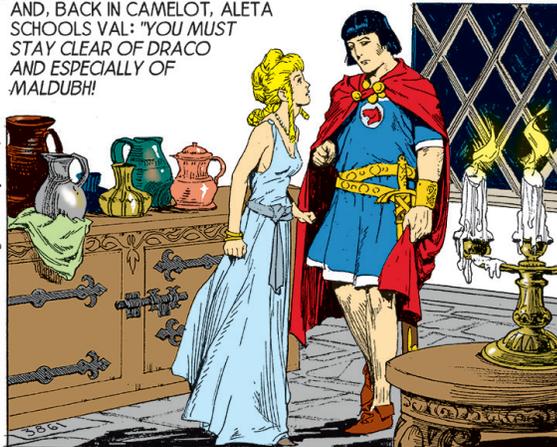
SHE BECKONS TO ONE OF HER HUSBAND'S HULKING VASSALS, AND THE FLAMES SUDDENLY LEAP UPWARD AND STRIKE THE MAN LIKE SERPENTS!



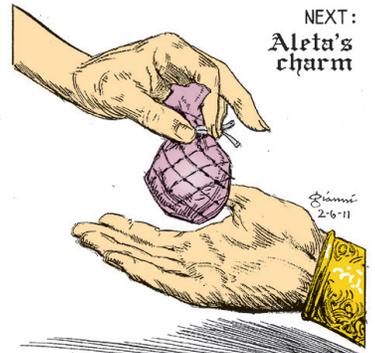
HIS EYES TURN HOLLOW AND MURDEROUS AS THE FUMES WREATHEN HIM. "GO, THOU BRAINLESS THING!" HISSES MALDUBH. "COMPLETE THY ORDAINED MISSION!"



AND, BACK IN CAMELOT, ALETA SCHOOLS VAL: "YOU MUST STAY CLEAR OF DRACO AND ESPECIALLY OF MALDUBH!"



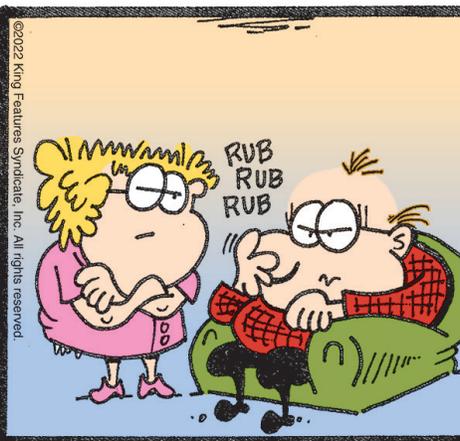
"TRUST MY SKILLS AND KEEP THIS SACHET ON YOUR PERSON AT ALL TIMES. IT IS A PROTECTION AGAINST EVIL!"



NEXT:
Aleta's charm

The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Breaking News Alert! Turn Off the Television

I learned a lesson this week when I discovered I'd spent over 10 hours glued to the news on television. Afterward, I was depressed and full of anxiety. I knew that couldn't be good for me.

It makes sense that a gym chain turned off the TVs in their locations in 27 states, believing that cable news wasn't good for a healthy lifestyle. And this was several years ago, when the news was comparatively milder than it is now. Consider how much different our lives — and the news — are today, and it makes a lot of sense to avoid an overdose of what's going on in the world.

My newest tactic is to use a timer. At the top of the hour, I'll turn on a cable news channel, watch for several minutes ... and then turn it off. Whatever is new will be talked about then, but it's often a repeat of the top of the previous hour.

What do we do instead once we turn off the news? Change to a different channel, perhaps one that shows re-runs from a previous era. The "Andy Griffith Show" comes to mind. So do "My Three Sons," "I Love Lucy" and "Columbo." Then there's premium fare like The History Channel, Smithsonian Channel and even best of British TV channels.

Or we can turn the television off altogether and, now that spring is here, go outside and walk. Or start a new garden. Or talk to neighbors who are also escaping the television.

There are specific health reasons to get away from the television news, and sitting too long is at the top of the list. It leads to memory decline, anxiety, stress ... which leads to insomnia and changes in diet.

We think we need to keep up with current events ... but at what cost?

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1. What college athletic conference produced both the men's and women's NCAA soccer champions in 2021?

2. Name the brothers, known for their violent style of play, who were teammates on the Montreal Canadiens in the 1920s and died within days of each other in 1956.

3. What NASCAR driver had 40 wins in his Cup Series career from 1981-2013 and finished second in the standings five times without winning a season championship?

4. What pro golfer from Australia portrayed comic-strip boxer Joe Palooka in 11 films from 1946-51?

5. On Sept. 7, 2021, what Tampa Bay Rays rookie reached base safely for the 37th consecutive game, passing Mickey Mantle's 36-game on-base streak for a player age 20 or younger?

6. Name the Canadian men's figure skater who won silver medals at the 1994 Lillehammer and 1998 Nagano



by Ryan A. Berenz

Winter Olympics.

7. In what Nintendo Entertainment System video game included basketball teams named the New York Eagles, Los Angeles Breakers, Boston Frogs and Chicago Ox?

Answers

1. The ACC, with Clemson (men) and Florida State (women).
2. Sprague and Odie Cleghorn.
3. Mark Martin.
4. Joe Kirkwood Jr.
5. Wander Franco.
6. Elvis Stojko.
7. "Double Dribble."

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps





Avoid Predatory Loans From Some Pet Stores

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: I recently read an article about a predatory lender that is targeting people buying dogs at some pet stores. These loans have insane interest rates as high as 130% to 189%! Please warn your readers to avoid taking out high-interest loans to buy a new pet. So many pets are in shelters, waiting for their forever homes. Don't buy from a puppy mill! — *Janie F., Sarasota, Florida*

DEAR JANIE: Thank you for sounding the alarm! A recent CBS News report warned about a lending business called EasyPay Finance that charges huge interest rates. Find the article here: <https://tinyurl.com/26b8mdcz/>

Predatory loans and pet stores that source from puppy mills are a nasty

storm of awfulness. Often, puppy mill dogs arrive at the store in poor condition, and new owners who've just paid thousands of dollars to buy a dog now have to shell out thousands more for medical care.

The message here is clear: Don't take out a high-interest loan to buy a pet. If you spend time researching the perfect dog for your family, then you should also spend time studying the financial aspects of dog ownership.

Do business with reputable breeders — you should be able to visit the breeder and see the conditions your prospective pet lives in, meet the puppies and their mother, and discuss their care. Good breeders care about their dogs' welfare. If you're going to pay thousands of dollars for a pet, choose this route.

Shelter pets are another option. If you aren't breed-specific but want a wonderful companion, contact the local shelter. Adoption fees are a few hundred dollars, but that is significantly less than what puppy mills are charging. And you'll get a healthy dog that's ready for a new family. It's a win-win.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

Strange BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

doesn't contain any nuts. While ground almonds used to be included, since 2006 just "natural almond flavor" has been used, and that is typically derived from apricot and peach pits.

- * An estimated 5% of the population has never experienced a headache.
- * Who needs Red Bull? In the early 1900s, distance runners were given champagne, brandy or even strychnine (rat poison) as a type of "energy drink" during long races.
- * Robert Pirsig's "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" holds the world record for being the most often rejected book to later become a bestseller, with a whopping 121 refusals before a publisher finally agreed to buy it.
- * On the moon, the Earth doesn't appear to rise or set, just wobble a bit.
- * A Ukrainian couple tried to save their failing relationship by handcuffing themselves together. They lasted about four months before throwing in the towel for good.
- * Studies have shown that removing lead from gasoline was a factor leading to the decline of violent crime in 1990s America. Individuals exposed to lead at young ages have numerous conditions and problems with impulse control, all of which may negatively impact their decisions as they reach adulthood.

Thought for the Day: "You always pass failure on the way to success." --Mickey Rooney

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* A honey badger named Stoffel, resident of a wildlife center in South Africa, was noted not just for repeated escapes from his enclosure, but his stubborn penchant for pursuing much larger animals than himself. After ending up in the clinic after attacking two lions, upon his release, he immediately broke free to attack them again!

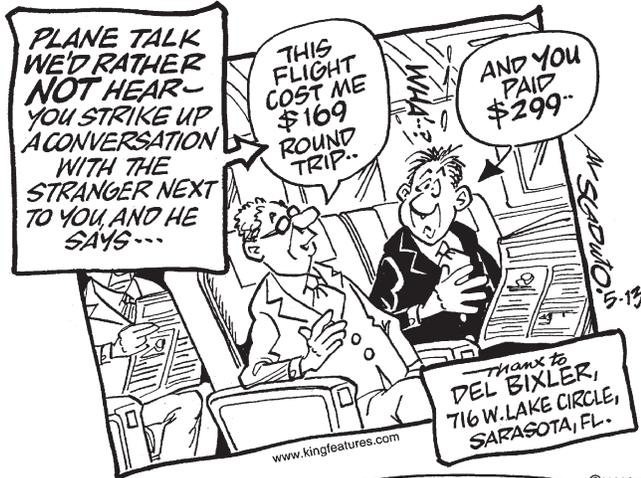
* The novelty song "Monster Mash" by Bobby Pickett was banned by the BBC for over a decade on the grounds it was too morbid.

* Sorry, Honey Nut Cheerios fans, your cereal

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THEY'LL DO IT EVERY TIME



BY AL SCADUTO

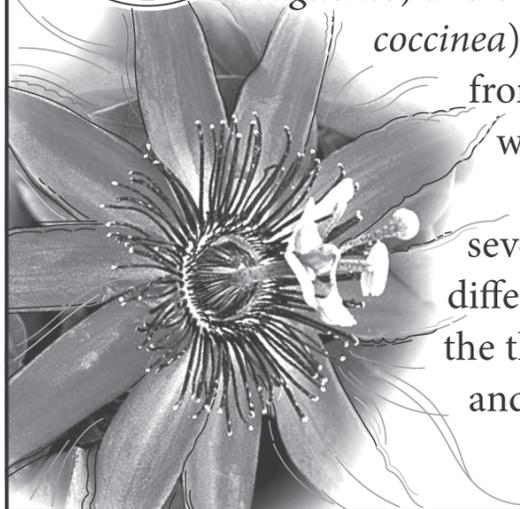


J'EVER NOTICE?
THOSE TV ADS
THAT FLASH THEIR
PHONE NUMBERS
GIVE YOU ABOUT
TEN SECONDS TO
RUMMAGE FOR A
PENCIL AND PAPER...
GOOD LUCK!

THANK TO
HANK PEARSON,
LACEY, WA.



The Garden Bug



Flowers with Easter meaning

Two South American plants given religious symbolism are the crucifix orchid (*Epidendrum ibaguense*) and the scarlet passion flower (*Passiflora coccinea*). The crucifix orchid's name comes from the shape of the lip of the flower which resembles a small, gold cross.

The scarlet passion flower exhibits several parts that are said to represent different aspects of Christ's crucifixion: the three nails, the five wounds of Jesus and the crown of thorns. - Brenda Weaver

Source: www.timesenterprise.com

VETERANS ★ POST ★

by Freddy Groves

The Stress of IBD

Coming on the heels of a stressful two years of pandemic, the Department of Veterans Affairs has aligned with a website dedicated to those who suffer from stress-related inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. And just in time. A recent long-term study of veterans concluded that over time, the stress of veterans with bowel disease has increased.

There are likely 66,000 veterans with bowel disease who all need information and resources, and the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation (CCF) is the place to go. Right on the dedicated webpage (www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/veterans), it asks important questions: What kind of doctor do I need? Where do I get care? How quickly can I get VA care once I'm registered?

As noted above, these last two years have put most of us under extra stress,

and those with bowel disease are many times more likely than others to experience depression, PTSD and anxiety as a fact of daily life. The CCF website points to coping tips that can help, such as meditation, relaxation techniques and exercise ... and getting help from a mental-health professional. Scroll to the bottom of the mental health page for sections on pain and fatigue, strategies to improve mental health, depression and anxiety, and daily life.

One section stands out: If you're going to be moving, you'll need a traveling veteran consult. Continuous care will begin before you leave and follow you through the move to your new location. With a traveling veteran consult, your records and info about your health and history will be ready for you on the other end. Any required care can pick up where it left off. Your responsibility will be to plan ahead and give them notice.

The website is loaded with information: diet and nutrition, complementary medicine, medications, resources and much more. The most help might be found in local chapters and support groups (there are over 200), where you'll find others who know exactly what you're experiencing.

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CONGRESSMAN
DUSTY JOHNSON
Representing **SOUTH DAKOTA** at large



APRIL FOOL'S—America's Oil and Gas Dilemma

This week, President Biden announced a two-part plan to increase America's oil supply. While the plan may appear good on paper, he is not fooling anyone.

Part one of the plan is to increase domestic oil production by imposing fees on companies that have unused approved permits. President Biden expressed frustration with companies not drilling, but obtaining a permit doesn't mean they can drill immediately. Some leases are going through a complex regulatory process or are held up in litigation—Western Energy Alliance says they are currently defending 2,200 leases in court. And just because the permit has been approved doesn't guarantee the well will produce oil and gas.

Part two of the plan is to release one million barrels of oil each day from our oil reserves for the next six months. The goal is to reduce gas prices in the medium-term while the administration attempts to bolster domestic energy production to the levels we saw under the Trump Administration. The Department of Energy plans to use the revenue from the oil released from reserves to restock the reserve in the future.

This dilemma becomes more complicated when you consider that our Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) is at its lowest level since 2002. Republicans even pushed to replenish the SPR in March 2020, when oil was at a much lower price, and Democrats opposed it.

Despite the Biden Administration's calls for renewable energy plans in the past, the new plan seems focused on two options—oil and electric. I have been vocal about the need to utilize alternative energy sources such as nuclear, biofuels, solar, wind, natural gas, and other traditional fuels to bolster our energy supply. Homegrown energy sources like biofuels have reduced our dependence on foreign oil – and they're a lot cleaner, too. The Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) has decreased our imports of gasoline by more than 80% and have helped cut our imports of crude oil by nearly 50%.

This week, I led a letter with 28 of my colleagues to President Biden, urging him to reinstate year-round availability of E-15 and uphold the RFS. A recent poll indicated 72% of Americans support increased availability of E-15, and 83% support increased renewable fuel production.

Implementing an all-of-the-above energy approach is crucial to cultivating a sustainable and reliable energy infrastructure. President Biden's oil vs. electric proposals are setting our independence and economy back. He can say his plans are going to solve the problems, but they aren't fooling me.

South Dakota Governor

Kristi Noem



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Serving Veterans, Supporting Soldiers

April marks Month of the Military Child, an annual celebration where communities across the country lift up the sons and daughters of our military heroes. During this time, we remember that the men and women in uniform are not the only ones who sacrifice for our country – their families sacrifice time together. Sometimes they even sacrifice the life of their loved ones.

Throughout the month, there will be several events and special recognition days where you can participate in bringing joy to our military families. If you're not sure where to begin, here are a couple of places to get you started:

Friday, April 8th:

Purple Up! For Military Kids Day in South Dakota. Service Members, families, youth, schools, and community members are encouraged to join the SDNG Child & Youth Program, Ellsworth Air Force Base, and communities everywhere in wearing PURPLE as a visible way to show support and thanks to our military kids.

For a full list of events and special discounts for military families this month, go to <https://ellsworthfss.com/special-events/month-of-the-military-child>.

This month comes at an important time as veterans and military families in South Dakota face an uncertain future with veterans' health services. In mid-March, the Biden Administration announced it was looking to close or cut several key veterans' health care facilities around the state.

South Dakota is the number one state for veterans to live and work. We're also ranked in the Top 5 states for veterans to retire. Why is that? Because we honor our veterans for their service and sacrifice. We honor them not just with our words; we back it up with action.

My administration started the Fallen Heroes Bridge Dedication program to honor South Dakotans who lost their lives in the line of duty. And we built the first-ever State Veterans Cemetery to give a final resting place to those who served our nation in uniform. We respect the occupational license of active-duty military and their spouses so they can go right to work when they move to South Dakota. We've improved readiness facilities and capabilities for our nationally top-ranked National Guard units. We help veterans to receive free technical education classes, and active-duty soldiers and their families get in-state tuition at all our campuses.

South Dakota also ranks Top 5 for health care for veterans, but that ranking will be tough to hold onto if the Biden Administration follows through on its proposal to downsize and close veterans' health facilities across our state. In South Dakota, we will continue to back up our support for veterans with action. I will do everything in my power to fight the Biden Administration on this proposal.

On March 29th, our nation honored National Vietnam Veterans Day to pay tribute to the brave soldiers who came home from that difficult conflict. More than 27,000 South Dakotans served during the War in Vietnam. Some of them didn't receive a friendly welcome home. In fact, National Vietnam Veterans Day

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wasn't recognized until 2017 under then-President Donald J. Trump.

That is a powerful reminder that we can always do more to honor those who served on our behalf. We can give them more time; we can give them more thanks; we can give them more energy. Many of our veterans come home scarred in body and mind. Let's show them that their sacrifice was worth it through our actions. After all, actions speak louder than words.

I hope you will each take the time to thank our active-duty service members, their families, and our veterans. Find ways to give back or volunteer with organizations that support veterans and military families.

This month let's all take some extra time to assess how we can give back. Let's celebrate Month of the Military Child, but then let's take it a step further and find ways to give back to our veterans. By volunteering to support those who sacrifice everything for our freedom, we can build an even stronger America.



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John Thune
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH DAKOTA



It's Farm Bill Season

It's hard to believe, but it's now been more than three years since the 2018 farm bill became law. As the old saying goes, though, there's no rest for the weary, something South Dakota agriculture producers know better than anyone. We're still more than a year away from needing to pass the next farm bill, but it's time to start thinking about it now.

During my time in Congress, as a member of both the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, I've worked on four farm bills, and I'm particularly proud of the nearly 20 measures I was able to get included in the 2018 farm bill. Among other things, I authored provisions to improve the Agriculture Risk Coverage program, improve the accuracy of the U.S. Drought Monitor, and include soil health as a research priority at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I also secured approval for a new, short-term alternative to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) – the Soil Health and Income Protection Program – to provide an option for farmers who don't want to take their land out of production for the 10 to 15 years required under CRP.

I would never have been able to get all this done without the input of South Dakota farmers and ranchers. These provisions were a direct result of extensive conversations with South Dakota producers, who provided insight into the challenges they were facing and what improvements could make things easier in this demanding way of life.

As I look to the 2023 bill, I will once again be relying on South Dakota farmers and ranchers to lend their firsthand knowledge to this effort. I recently held the first of a series of roundtables I'm planning to hold in South Dakota to hear directly from producers. The roundtable focused on the commodity and crop insurance titles of the next farm bill, and I was grateful to be able to hear from representatives of South Dakota Farm Bureau and South Dakota corn, soybean, and wheat producers, as well as crop insurance industry representatives.

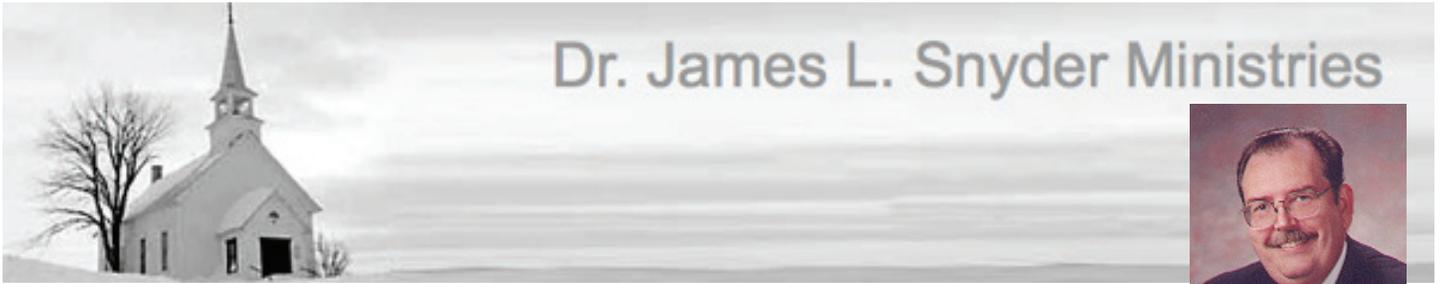
I will be holding additional roundtables to cover other farm bill priorities, including livestock, conservation, and forestry issues. And, of course, I will also continue to rely on the many informal conversations I have with South Dakota producers as I travel around the state. There's nothing worse than having "experts" in Washington come in and dictate to the real experts – the farmers and ranchers who spend every day producing the food that feeds our nation.

The life of a farmer or rancher is a challenging one. The work often starts long before the sun rises, and concludes long after the sun has set. And the labor can be backbreaking. Not to mention the deep uncertainty that goes along with this existence. The food we eat every day depends upon their work, and our country would not long survive without them. I am very proud to have the honor of representing South Dakota farmers and ranchers in the Senate. And I will continue to work every day to ensure that their needs are addressed.

I look forward to ensuring that the 2023 farm bill reflects the priorities of South Dakota farmers and ranchers, and farmers and ranchers around our great country.

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Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries



A Switch in Time On My behind

Recently, I was reminded of my father's passing 12 years ago. It's funny how time quickly goes by, and then something happens to remind you of the past.

When I was growing up, spankings were normal. And, for someone like me, those spankings were quite regular. Today my father would be arrested for all the spankings he gave me while I was growing up. At that time, something was wrong if you didn't get a spanking.

When I was in the fifth grade, my schoolteacher happened to have been my father's schoolteacher. I'm afraid she wouldn't pass today because she also believed in spankings, as did our elementary school principal.

I remember when we went to class right after some bill passed saying we could not pray in school. Our fifth-grade teacher stood before the class with the spanking stick bouncing it off her hand and said most arrogantly, "Let them come to my class and tell me I'm not allowed to pray." I would not have wanted to be that person.

Home rule was simple; if I get a spanking at school, I get a spanking at home. That's just how it was, and I had to learn to live with it.

Quite often, our schoolteacher, before the day began, would stand before the class with the spanking stick and remind everybody that she was in charge and if you didn't do it her way, you would get the spanking stick. Sometimes we were sent to the principal's office to get a spanking. I would rather go to the principal's office than have my teacher spank me if the truth were known. He knew when to quit; she didn't.

After a spanking at school, my father was informed about my spanking. When I got home, he was standing there, ready for me to come in, and escorted me to my bedroom, where he honored me with another spanking. He didn't know what I got spanked for, and it didn't matter to him. The spanking at school meant a spanking at home. That was the rule.

I tried to figure out ways to keep my father from knowing about the school spanking, but that was impossible because my teacher knew my father.

During that time, I did not have an advocate in the situation of home spankings, that is, until one day.

Growing up, I loved hunting, and usually, it would be for rabbits. That was the vogue in those days.

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Because I loved hunting rabbits, I needed a dog. So I got a beagle and trained him to hunt rabbits with me. So we made a good team. We spent a lot of time together, so there was that deep bond between a young boy and his dog, almost like "Old Yeller."

One day, as usual, I got into trouble. I can't remember the trouble, but it's not important now. What is important is that the trouble inspired my father to donate a high-class spanking to me.

I was outside near my dog pen and saw my father come toward me angrily waving his belt. I knew exactly what was in store for me, and there was no place to run. And if I did run, I would sooner or later have to come back home. So the best thing for me to do was to wait and take my punishment like a boy in trouble.

No way was I prepared for what was going to happen next.

As my father came closer, I could hear him yelling, and he was waving his belt in the air, and it would not be too long to get to me.

When he got to me, he continued yelling and began the spanking session. Even he wasn't prepared for what was going to happen.

Suddenly, I heard my dog, Sparky, bark as I had never heard him bark before. He was chained to his pen, which would assume a great deal of safety from the dog. But not Sparky.

Before I could process it, I heard Sparky yell and lunge forward, and then I heard the chain break, and he was on his way to my father. I'm sure he wasn't going to my father to give him a good friendly hug.

He lunged for my father, and my father turned and ran as fast as he could, but Sparky caught him several times and bit him.

My dilemma at the time was, do I laugh or cry? Nobody ever stood up for me through all my spanking sessions.

My father finally got into the garage and shut the door. Sparky turned around and came racing toward me. He wiggled and waggled when he got there and wanted me to pet him, which I did most graciously.

My father's favorite Bible verse, and he quoted it repeatedly in my presence, was, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Proverbs 13:24).

I must say that he was very faithful to this verse of Scripture.

As a father, I was more into this verse, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

I have tried to combine these two verses throughout my life. Each situation demands a lot of thought, and I've tried to give my thoughts a lot of room.

EARTHTALK ™



Newer technology that has farmers and ranchers capturing methane from their livestock waste is better for the planet than not having it. Credit: Mark Stebnicki, Pexels.

Dear EarthTalk: Is encouraging dairy farmers and cattle ranchers to capture methane gas from their livestock's manure good or bad for the planet?
-- Phil Onorato, Pittsburgh, PA

Methane capture, the process of using the decomposition of livestock byproducts like cow and hog manure to generate electricity, is a promising technology. It helps to resolve existing, and for the time being, necessary evils such as climate-warming methane emissions from cattle and pigs. It works by exposing the livestock waste to bacteria and enzymes that break down the embedded methane into usable natural gas that can be pumped right into generators.

Large farms and livestock operations that employ this now widely available technology can turn their cattle and pigs from a climate scourge—methane is a much more potent greenhouse gas than even carbon dioxide—into at least a producer of renewable energy (even if it is a fossil fuel).

One benefit of generating natural gas this way is that the resource is renewable, as long as cows and pigs keep defecating. Another is that methane capture accommodates existing technologies. Methane capture fuel and traditional natural gas use the same infrastructure.

The downside of methane capture, at least as far as environmentalists are concerned, is that it perpetuates the fossil-fuel-oriented status quo and further incentivizes the factory farm business model instead of a shift to true zero-emission renewables like solar, wind and geothermal. The factory farm business model has wreaked havoc on the environment from coast to coast, from pig waste overflows in North Carolina to poisoned waterways in the Midwest from runoff contaminated by livestock waste to California drought from cattle ranches claiming more than their fair share of water to quench cattle thirst.

But proponents of using methane emissions to offset methane production by livestock argue that their way of producing energy is just as "zero emission" as solar or wind. Yet we wouldn't even need the process of methane capture to begin with without the livestock trade. Carbon offsets also do not reduce methane emissions, they simply compensate for them. In a sense, they are robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Policy pushes abound on both sides of the issue. These include the California state government walking a fine line between supporting its farm-based economy, while leaning toward a greener future through incentivizing methane capture. Their opponents, including advocacy groups like Food and Water Watch, the Sierra Club, the Southern Environmental Law Center and the Natural Resources Defense Council, are coordinating on crafting legal solutions to manure-related pollution issues.

Methane capture may be a controversial technology, but it is worth investigating. Solutions that can work right now have some benefits over solutions that are only possible in the distant future. But future planning will require more ambitious solutions than temporary replacements.

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South Dakota COVID-19 Report

New Confirmed and Probable Cases

154

Active Cases

537
-1889

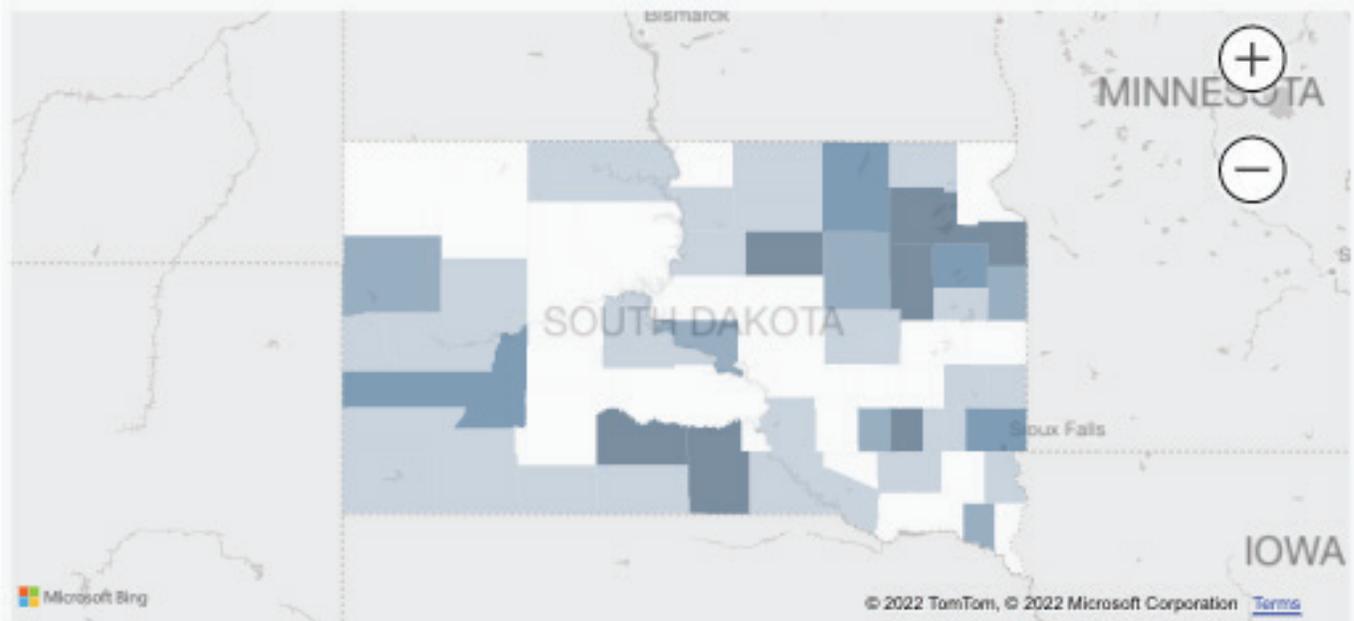
Recovered Cases

233,689

Currently Hospitalized

43

Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Total Confirmed and Probable Cases

237,109

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 7 Days

4.4%

3/23/2022 - 3/29/2022

Total Tests

2,136,483

Ever Hospitalized

10,717

Deaths Among Cases

2,883

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

169%

% Progress (March Goal: 44233 Tests)

91%

% Progress (April Goal: 44233 Tests)

0%

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Brown County COVID-19 Report

New Confirmed and Probable Cases

6

Active Cases

33
- 102

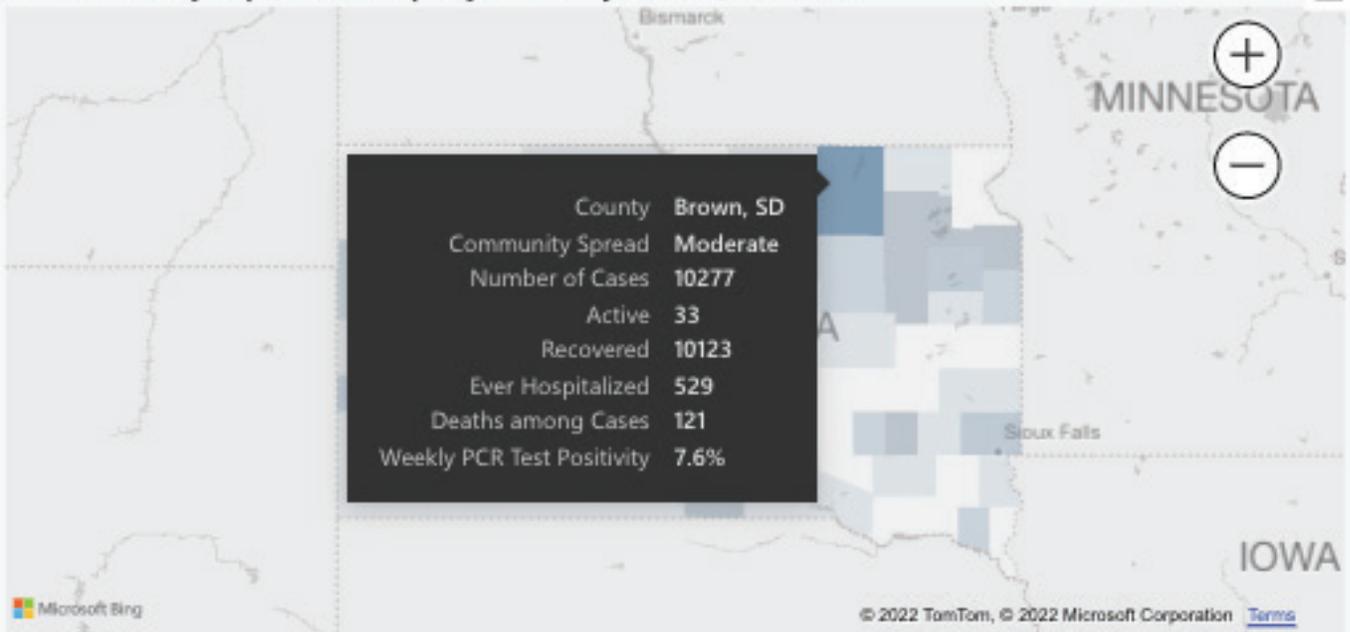
Recovered Cases

10,123

Currently Hospitalized

43

Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread Low Moderate Substantial High

Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.

More information on U.S COVID-19 Community levels can be found at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/covid-by-county.html>

Total Confirmed and Probable Cases

10,277

PCR Test Positivity Rate, Last 7 Days

3.5%

3/23/2022 - 3/29/2022

Total Tests

102,891

Ever Hospitalized

529

Deaths Among Cases

121

% Progress (February Goal: 44233 Tests)

169%

% Progress (March Goal: 44233 Tests)

91%

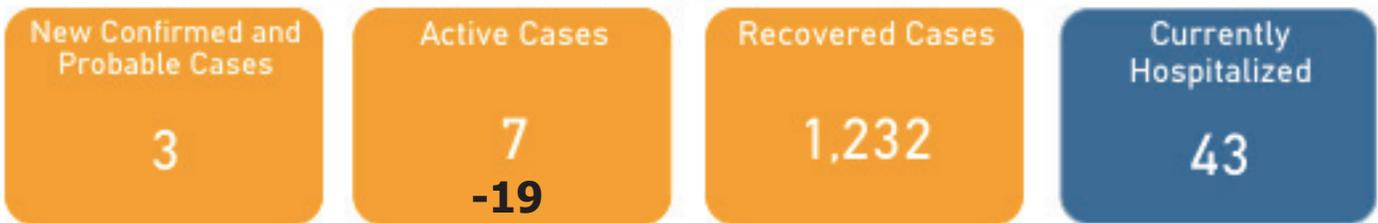
% Progress (April Goal: 44233 Tests)

0%

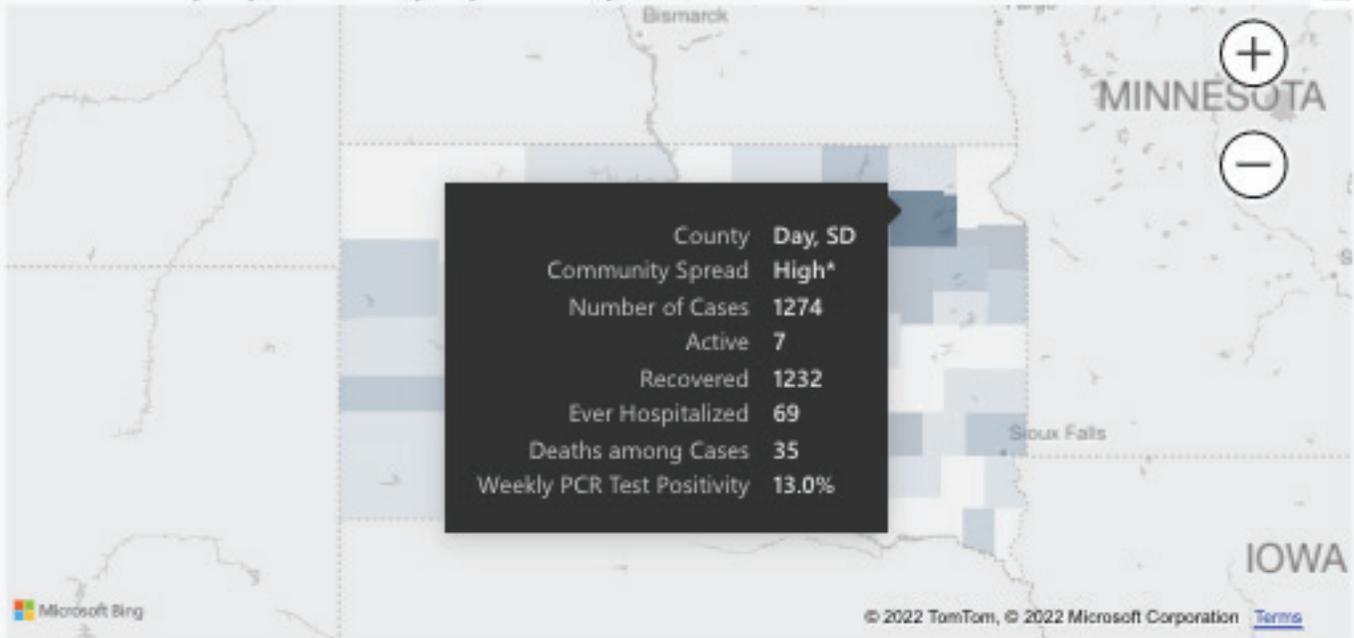
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Day County COVID-19 Report



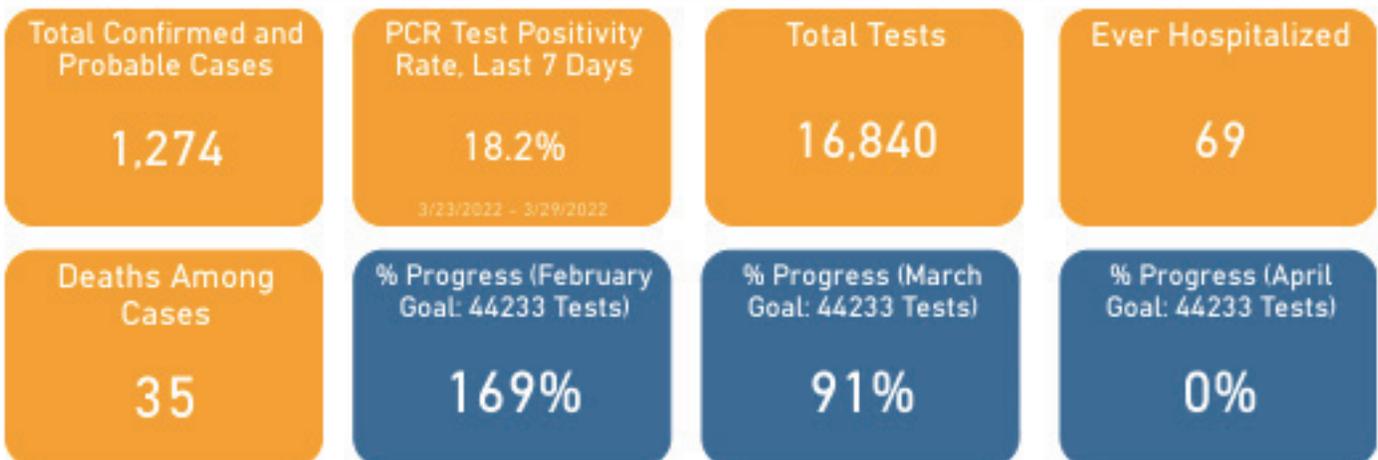
Community Spread Map by County of Residence



Community Spread Low Moderate Substantial High

Hover over a county to see its details, or click county to update the orange boxes.

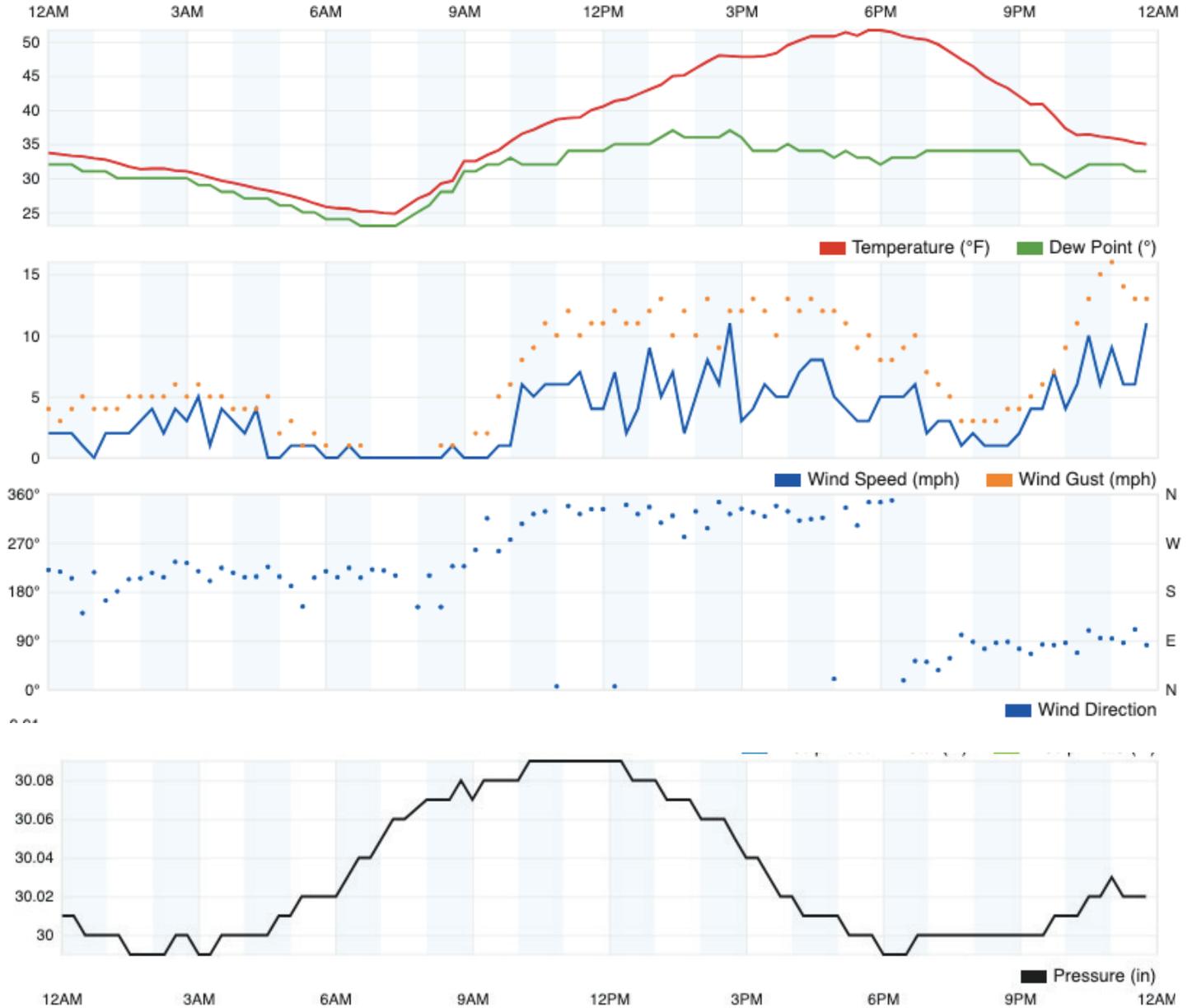
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Sunday



Rain/Snow
Likely then
Rain and
Breezy

High: 42 °F

Sunday
Night



Decreasing
Clouds

Low: 22 °F

Monday



Partly Sunny
then Mostly
Sunny and
Breezy

High: 54 °F

Monday
Night



Breezy.
Mostly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance Rain

Low: 41 °F

Tuesday



Chance Rain
and Breezy

High: 56 °F

Today
40s

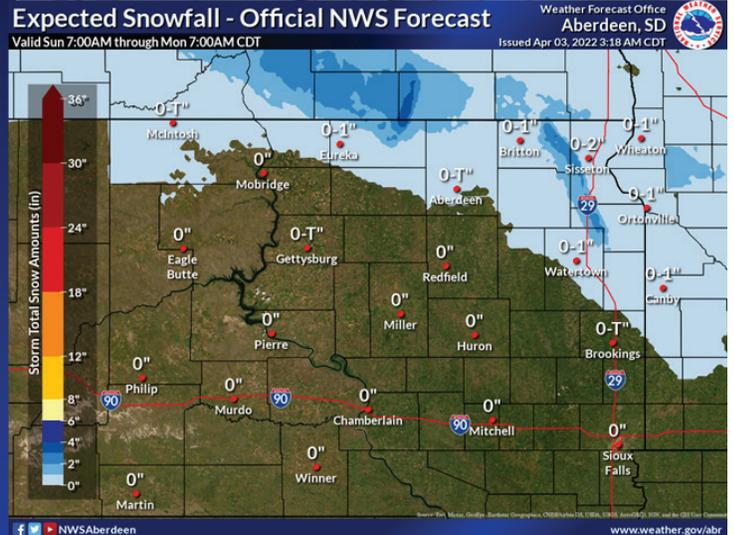


Light Wintry Mix.

Light snowfall accumulations possible over the higher elevations of the Leola Hills & Sisseton Hills.

Except...
Dry and Windy over south central South Dakota.

 Elevated Fire Weather Concerns



A low pressure system will bring a wintry mix of precipitation to much of the area, especially near the North Dakota border to northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. Light snowfall accumulations are possible over the higher elevations of the Leola Hills and Sisseton Hills. Otherwise, dry weather is expected to continue over south central South Dakota. This is where dry conditions and increased winds out of the northwest will result in elevated fire weather concerns.

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Maximum Wind Gust Forecast

	4/3 Sun			4/4 Mon				4/5 Tue				4/6 Wed				4/7 Thu				4/8 Fri			
	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm
Aberdeen	24	30	25	10	21	26	39	40	36	39	33	30	37	41	41	37	39	39	36	28	25	25	22
Britton	29	29	23	10	18	25	39	40	36	37	30	25	33	39	39	36	38	40	36	29	25	28	23
Eagle Butte	36	36	26	17	25	30	29	35	40	47	45	44	46	53	49	39	39	44	36	26	21	20	21
Eureka	24	28	21	10	23	31	38	36	40	44	38	37	39	44	44	37	39	39	37	25	22	22	18
Gettysburg	26	32	26	13	24	36	38	37	38	40	39	39	40	46	45	37	38	39	36	28	22	25	20
Kennebec	38	44	37	9	21	33	38	39	39	41	40	41	45	48	46	38	40	41	37	29	21	28	23
McIntosh	24	29	21	18	30	37	33	35	47	49	46	45	45	51	49	38	39	41	37	24	21	25	22
Milbank	22	24	22	15	8	17	28	30	30	32	25	24	29	36	35	35	39	40	36	29	23	26	22
Miller	24	31	30	10	17	30	38	40	39	40	35	36	39	43	43	37	39	40	36	28	22	23	21
Mobridge	22	28	21	13	23	30	33	29	35	37	37	36	39	48	48	36	39	37	33	23	20	23	21
Murdo	41	45	39	14	24	35	39	38	41	45	44	46	49	54	47	40	39	43	38	28	18	23	22
Pierre	32	37	31	7	18	31	35	32	36	39	39	38	44	48	44	37	38	43	36	24	18	22	18
Redfield	25	31	30	10	17	29	39	41	38	39	35	33	37	41	41	37	39	40	36	28	25	26	22
Sisseton	22	23	21	10	10	21	33	35	33	32	29	25	32	39	39	37	39	40	38	29	28	30	21
Watertown	30	29	26	17	10	21	31	38	37	37	30	25	32	38	38	36	39	41	38	31	26	29	23
Wheaton	21	22	18	10	9	17	31	33	33	30	25	20	25	35	35	35	39	39	36	25	22	23	18

*Table values in mph

STRONG WINDS expected:

- ✓ Today over central South Dakota.
- ✓ Monday afternoon over central South Dakota.
- ✓ Monday Evening through Thursday across entire area!

Strong winds are expected today and Monday afternoon over portions of central South Dakota, and then Monday evening through Thursday across the entire area. The combination of warm conditions, continued dry weather, and strong winds will result in elevated fire weather concerns over south central South Dakota this afternoon! This area of concern will expand to all of central South Dakota Monday afternoon through Tuesday.

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Today in Weather History

April 3, 1968: Heavy snowfall, up to ten inches, was accompanied by winds of over 60 mph in parts of South Dakota. Snowdrifts of up to 4 feet were reported, and many roads were closed. Aberdeen was one of the hardest hit areas with 10.5 inches of snow and wind gusts of 62 mph. The strong winds and localized areas of icing caused considerable damage to utility lines.

April 3, 2003: Dry vegetation, along with windy conditions, caused a grassland burn northeast of Bath, near the James River in South Dakota, to get out of control during the early afternoon hours. Strong north to northeast winds of 20 to 35 mph caused the fire to spread quickly south along the James River. The fire became one and a half miles wide and burned six miles to the south before it was brought under control. A total of 4,000 acres were consumed. The smoke from the fire could be seen from miles around and lowered visibilities enough to close State Highway 12 two different times. At one point, traffic had to be diverted on Highway 12 for six hours due to the low visibility in smoke. Also, the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railroad was delayed in Bristol and Andover on April 3rd because of the smoke. Twenty-one fire departments with around 250 people worked to bring the fire under control.

April 3, 2007: A sharp frontal boundary along with an upper-level disturbance brought an unusual band of heavy snow across northern South Dakota. Snowfall amounts of 6 to 12 inches occurred from Eureka to Summit. Roads became snow covered or slushy making travel difficult. Due to the poor road conditions, several vehicles ended up in the ditch. Several schools and events were either postponed or canceled. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Eureka and Milbank, 7 inches at Conde, 8 inches at Hosmer, Columbia, Summit, and Britton, 10 inches at Webster, and 12 inches at Waubay.

April 3, 2009: An area of low pressure moved across the Central Plains producing widespread snow over central and north central South Dakota. Along with the snow came strong north winds of 15 to 30 mph causing areas of blowing snow and reduced visibilities. The snow and reduced visibility caused some travel problems. Snowfall amounts ranged from a few inches to almost a foot of snow. Some of the snowfall amounts included; 6 inches near Presho and Okaton, Fort Thompson, and Timber Lake; 7 inches in Murdo and 16 S Ree Heights; 8 inches 14 NNE Isabel and 11 inches 3 NW Parade and 6 E Hayes.

1898: An avalanche near Chilkoot Pass, Alaska in the Yukon during the Gold Rush buried 142 people and killed 43 others.

1964: KAUZ in Wichita Falls, Texas broadcast the first live television pictures of an F5 tornado moving through the city. Seven people were killed, 111 injured and 225 homes were destroyed during the twisters 5 to a 6-mile path. Extensive damage was done at Sheppard Air Force Base where three tanker planes, a hanger, the power plant, and the chapel were all destroyed. Damage estimates exceeded \$15 million.

1974: A "Super-Outbreak" of tornadoes ravaged the Midwest and the eastern U.S. Severe weather erupted early in the afternoon and continued through the next day. Severe thunderstorms spawned 148 tornadoes from Alabama to Michigan, most of which occurred between 1 PM (CST) on the 3rd and 1 AM on the 4th. The tornadoes killed 315 persons, injured 5300 others, and caused 600 million dollars damage. Alabama, Kentucky, and Ohio were especially hard hit in the tornado outbreak. One tornado destroyed half of the town of Xenia, Ohio killing 34 persons. Another tornado, near the city of Stamping Ground, Kentucky produced a path of destruction a record five miles in width. A tornado raced through Guin, Alabama at a speed of 75 mph. Two powerful tornadoes roared across northern Alabama during the early evening hours, killing fifty persons and injuring 500 others. Some rescue vehicles responding to the first tornado were struck by the second.

1987: An extensive, slow-moving low-pressure system produced very heavy snows over the Appalachian Region lasting through April 5th. 60 inches fell at Newfound Gap in western North Carolina, the most substantial single storm snowfall in the state's history. Up to 36 inches was reported in southeastern Kentucky. The total of 25 inches at Charleston, WV easily surpassed its previous record for the entire month of April of 5.9 inches. The 20.6 inch total at Akron, OH established an all-time record for that location. Snow closed interstate 40 for the first time since it was opened in 1967. Lightning and thunder accompanied the snow in some areas while a trace fell as far south as Mobile. The snow was the first snow ever reported in April in Mobile since records began in 1872. The storm became known unofficially as the "Dogwood Snowstorm" as many trees had fully bloomed.

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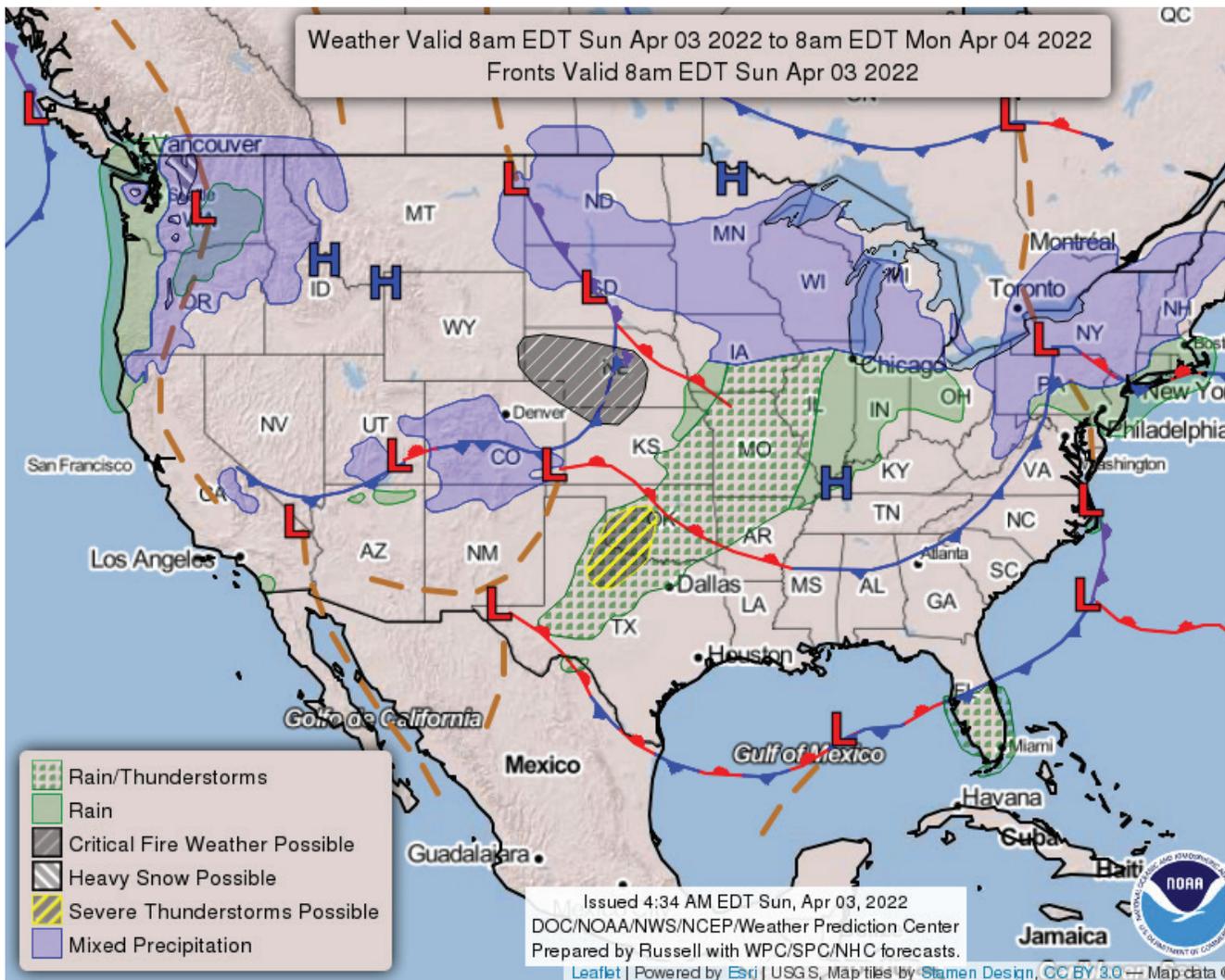
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 52 °F at 6:02 PM
Low Temp: 25 °F at 7:29 AM
Wind: 14 mph at 2:47 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 12 hours, 57 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 83 in 1921
Record Low: -2 in 2018
Average High: 52°F
Average Low: 27°F
Average Precip in April.: 0.12
Precip to date in April.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 2.18
Precip Year to Date: 1.80
Sunset Tonight: 8:04:27 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:04:51 AM



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A Strong Heart

After walking for what seemed to be miles, he stopped at the corner of an apple orchard to admire the beautiful apples. The owner of the orchard noticed him and asked, "Son, are you trying to steal my apples?"

"No, sir," he replied, "I'm trying not to. But my trying not to is losing to my wanting to."

It was that way with David. Deep in his heart, he wanted to do what was right. But one day he realized that his friendship with evil men was a strong force that was often more powerful than his desire to do the right things.

As his walk with the Lord grew stronger, he began to realize that there was a power beyond human power, And, if he wanted to, he could choose victory over defeat by depending on that power. He was able to move from being overcome by their power to overcoming temptation and sin by calling upon God's power.

So, he went to God in prayer and asked, "Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in evil deeds with men who are evildoers; let me not eat of their delicacies."

One of the most powerful thoughts that the devil places in our minds is that we are human, and that God realizes we may be overcome by temptation to sin. It's so easy to rationalize sin's power and our weakness to be tempted to sin.

Paul had an answer or this excuse. "There is no temptation that is more powerful than God's power. And He'll provide a way of escape if you want it," he added.

Prayer: Lord, help us to confront our excuse of being human as a reason to sin. Remind us that we can run to You for safety. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Do not let my heart be drawn to what is evil so that I take part in wicked deeds along with those who are evildoers; do not let me eat their delicacies. Psalm 141:4

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2022 Community Events

- 01/30/2022 84th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
01/30/2022 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am – 1pm, Groton Community Center, 109 N 3rd St, Groton,
04/07/2022 Groton CDE
04/09/2022 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/09/2022 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/23/2022 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/24/2022 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/07/2022 Lions Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
St John's Lutheran Church VBS 9-11am
05/30/2022 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
Transit Fundraiser at the Community Center 4-7pm (Thursday Mid-June)
06/17/2022 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm Start
06/18/2022 Groton Triathlon
Ladies Invitational at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration 10am Start
07/04/2022 Firecracker Couples Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Registration, 10am Start
(4th of July)
07/10/2022 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar 11am-1pm at the Groton Legion
Baseball Tourney
07/21/2022 Pro Am Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
Ferney Open Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
How can we... "Love Groton"? United Methodist Church 9:30am
Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 9-11pm for 9th grade to age 20
Golf Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course 11a-1pm
08/05/2022 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
08/12/2022 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
United Methodist Church VBS 5-8pm
Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day 4-5pm GHS Parking Lot
09/10/2022 Lions Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
6th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 3:30-5pm
09/11/2022 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 12pm
Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/14/2022 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am (2nd Friday in October)
10/01/2022 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
10/31/2022 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
10/31/2022 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
11/12/2022 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/24/2022 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/03/2022 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party at Olive Grove Golf Course
Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-12pm
01/29/2023 Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Saturday:

Dakota Cash

02-04-15-21-33

(two, four, fifteen, twenty-one, thirty-three)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America

03-04-11-43-44, Star Ball: 8, ASB: 3

(three, four, eleven, forty-three, forty-four; Star Ball: eight; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$10.25 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$81 million

Powerball

06-28-47-58-59, Powerball: 18, Power Play: 2

(six, twenty-eight, forty-seven, fifty-eight, fifty-nine; Powerball: eighteen; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$222 million

South Dakota State cruises past Seton Hall 82-50 wins WNIT

BROOKINGS, S.D. (AP) — Kallie Theisen scored a career-high 16 points and grabbed 11 rebounds, Myah Selland added 12 points, 11 rebounds and five assists and South Dakota State used a huge first-quarter run to beat Seton Hall 82-50 Saturday in the championship game of the WNIT.

Haleigh Timmer added 14 points, Paiton Burckhard scored 13 and Tori Nelson 11 for South Dakota State (29-9). Timmer, who came off the bench in all but two of South Dakota State's first 28 games and went into the title game averaging 7.8 points this season, started each of the team's six games and averaged 17.0 points in the WNIT.

The Jackrabbits, who never trailed, scored 15 consecutive points to cap a 21-1 run that made it 25-5 with a minute left in the first quarter. Seton Hall (24-13) went more than 7 minutes without a field goal, missing 11 consecutive shots and committing two turnovers, during that span and trailed by at least 20 points throughout the second half.

Sydney Cooks led the Pirates with 14 points and nine rebounds but made just 6 of 18 from the field. Andra Espinoza-Hunter, the only other Seton Hall player to score in double figures, had 10 points on 3-of-14 shooting.

Seton Hall's Lauren Park-Hill, the team's leader in scoring (18.6 per game) and assists (7.1) this season, had eight points, four assists and three steals. The unanimous first-team all-Big East selection went 0 for 12 from the field and 0 for 5 from 3-point range and committed six turnovers.

South Dakota proposal would increase bighorn sheep licenses

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota wildlife officials are looking to increase the number of bighorn sheep hunting licenses for the next two years.

The bighorn sheep hunting season proposal for the 2022 and 2023 seasons increases the ram bighorn sheep licenses from eight to 10, with an additional license being made available for auction. It also requires hunters to attend a meeting orientation before their first day of hunting, rather than the opening day of the season as was previously mandated.

The proposal offers three licenses for the Elk Mountain District, which is the same as last year. There

will be four licenses offered for the Hell Canyon District, instead of the two offered last year. In Custer State Park, the department will offer three licenses, an increase of last year's one, the Black Hills Pioneer reported.

The plan closes the Eastern Pennington Unit, near the Badlands National Park, where there has been a deadly bacterial outbreak. It also addresses visibility for bighorn sheep in Custer State Park.

"Based on the strong numbers of ram bighorn sheep across all age classes, the increase to the number of licenses being proposed in Custer State Park will not negatively affect the viewability of bighorn sheep for park visitors and will provide additional hunting opportunities," the proposal states. "Modifying the requirement for the mandatory hunter orientation will provide better customer service to those licensed hunters."

Live updates: Pope calls on world to pray for end to war

By The Associated Press undefined

VALLETTA, Malta — Pope Francis is praying for an end to the "sacrilegious" war in Ukraine and for the world to show kindness and compassion to refugees.

Wrapping up a final Mass in Malta on Sunday, Francis urged the faithful to "think of the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in the martyred Ukraine, which continues to be bombarded in this sacrilegious war."

He called for the world to be "tireless in praying and in offering assistance to those who suffer."

Among those at the Mass was Alina Shcherbyna, a 25-year-old Ukrainian who arrived in Malta just over a week ago after fleeing her bombed-out home in Dnipro. She left behind her parents, who are both doctors and had to remain.

Carrying Ukrainian and Vatican flags, Shcherbyna said she wanted to ask the pope and the world for prayers for Ukraine.

"At school we were studying a lot about the Second World War, about bomb shelters and about this disaster, and we thought it was impossible in present time," she said. "We thought it had ended in 1945 and that was it. But now, it's really shocking for all of us."

KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR:

- Russian missiles strike fuel depots in Odesa; civilians await another possible evacuation
- Ukraine blogger video fuels false info on Mariupol bombing
- Ukrainian forces retake areas near Kyiv
- Russian space chief says sanctions could imperil International Space Station
- Ukraine volunteer fighters from near and far: a photo gallery
- Go to <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine> for more coverage

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

MOSCOW — Russia's top negotiator in talks with Ukraine says it's too early to talk about a meeting between the two countries' president.

Vladimir Medinsky, who led the Russian delegation in Tuesday's talks in Istanbul, Turkey, said "there is still a lot of work to do" to finalize a draft agreement before Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy could meet.

Speaking Sunday in remarks carried by the Interfax news agency, Medinsky reaffirmed that the parties reached a tentative agreement on the need for Ukraine to adopt a neutral status and refrain from holding foreign military bases in exchange for international security guarantees.

Asked about Ukrainian negotiator Davyd Arakhamia's claim that Moscow's negotiators had informally agreed to most proposals by Ukraine during the talks in Istanbul this week and the two presidents could discuss the draft deal, Medinsky said he doesn't share Arakhamia's optimism. He said the talks will continue online Monday.

Medinsky emphasized that Russia's stand on Crimea and rebel regions in Ukraine's east remained un-

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changed. The Kremlin demands that Ukraine acknowledge Russia's sovereignty over Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014, and recognize the independence of Russia-backed separatist regions in Donbas, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland.

KYIV, Ukraine -- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy devoted a good part of his late-night address to his nation to call out Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban for his support of Russian President Vladimir Putin, as Hungarians prepared to vote in an election Sunday.

Zelenskyy depicted the Hungarian leader as out of touch with the rest of Europe, which has united to condemn Putin, support sanctions against Russia and send aid including weapons to Ukraine.

"He is virtually the only one in Europe to openly support Mr. Putin," Zelenskyy said.

Zelenskyy noted the Hungarian people support the Ukrainian people, and distinguished between Hungarians and what he called "official Budapest."

"The whole of Europe is trying to stop the war, to restore peace. Then why is official Budapest opposed to the whole of Europe, to all civilized countries?" Zelenskyy asked.

BERLIN — The mayor of the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, has expressed shock at what he called "cruel war crimes" committed by Russian soldiers in the town of Bucha northwest of the capital.

Referring to reports of executed civilians, Klitschko told German daily Bild on Sunday that "what happened in Bucha and other suburbs of Kyiv can only be described as genocide."

An AP crew on Sunday saw the bodies of at least nine people who appear to have been executed. At least two of them had their hands tied behind their backs. They were all in civilian clothes and at least three were naked from the waist up. One appeared shot in the chest from close range.

Klitschko said Russian President Vladimir Putin was responsible for these "cruel war crimes," adding that civilians had been "shot with tied hands."

He called on the the whole world and especially Germany to immediately end gas imports from Russia.

He said that "especially for Germany, there can only be one consequence: Not a penny should go to Russia anymore, that's bloody money used to slaughter people. The gas and oil embargo must come immediately."

The Russian military says it has struck an oil processing plant and fuel depots around the strategic Black Sea port of Odesa.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj.-Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Russian ships and aircraft fired missiles on Sunday to strike the facilities, which he said were used to provide fuel to Ukrainian troops near Mykolaiv.

Konashenkov also said Russian strikes destroyed ammunition depots in Kostiantynivka and Khresyshche.

In an audio message posted by Italian news agency ANSA, Italian photographer Carlo Orlandi said Odesa woke to military sirens at 5:45 a.m. Sunday, followed immediately by the sounds of bombs falling on the port city from two aircraft.

He described a column of dark smoke rising from the targets, and flames from the buildings.

"What we can see is a dense screen of dark smoke, and one explosion after the other," Orlandi said.

KYIV, Ukraine — The regional governor in Kharkiv said Russian troops have continued shelling the city in northeast Ukraine.

Kharkiv regional Gov. Oleh Synyehubov said Sunday that Russian artillery and tanks carried out over 20 strikes on Kharkiv and its outskirts over the past 24 hours.

Synyehubov said four people were wounded in a Russian missile strike on Lozova in the south of the Kharkiv region.

He said that in the town of Balakliia Russian tanks hit a local hospital, damaging the building and prompting the authorities to evacuate patients.

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LVIV, Ukraine – President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukrainian troops retaking areas around Kyiv and Chernihiv are not allowing Russians to retreat without a fight, but are “shelling them. They are destroying everyone they can.”

Zelenskyy, in his Saturday night video address to the nation, said Ukraine knows Russia has the forces to put even more pressure on the east and south of Ukraine.

“What is the goal of the Russian troops? They want to seize the Donbas and the south of Ukraine,” he said. “What is our goal? To defend ourselves, our freedom, our land and our people.”

He said a significant portion of the Russian forces are tied up around Mariupol, where the city’s defenders continue to fight.

“Thanks to this resistance, thanks to the courage and resilience of our other cities, Ukraine has gained invaluable time, time that is allowing us to foil the enemy’s tactics and weaken its capabilities,” Zelenskyy said.

Zelenskyy appealed again to the West for more modern weaponry, such as anti-missile systems and aircraft.

A Ukrainian beauty blogger whom Russian officials accused of being a crisis actor when she was interviewed and photographed by The Associated Press in a bombed out Mariupol maternity hospital has emerged in new videos that are fueling fresh misinformation about the attack.

A Russian government-linked Twitter account on Friday shared an interview with Marianna Vishegirska, in which the new mother says the hospital was not hit by an airstrike last month and that she told AP journalists she did not want to be filmed. But AP reporting, and recordings of AP journalists’ interactions with her, contradict her claim.

In the interview, conducted by Russian blogger Denis Seleznev and filmed by Kristina Melnikova, Vishegirska is asked to provide details about what occurred at the hospital on March 9, the day of the bombing. It is not clear where Vishegirska is, or under what conditions the interview was filmed.

Russian officials have repeatedly tried to cast doubt on the strike in Mariupol, a key military objective for Moscow, since images were seen around the world and shed light on Russia’s attacks on civilians in Ukraine.

In the new videos, Vishegirska says those huddled in the basement of the hospital after the attack believed the explosions were caused by “shelling,” not an airstrike, because “no one” heard sounds that would indicate that bombs were dropped from planes.

But eyewitness accounts and video from AP journalists in Mariupol lays out evidence of an airstrike, including the sound of an airplane before the blast, a crater outside the hospital that went at least two stories deep and interviews with a police officer and a soldier at the scene who both referred to the attack as an “airstrike.”

BUCHA, Ukraine — Ukrainian troops moved cautiously to retake territory north of Kyiv on Saturday, even amid fears that Russian forces left booby-trapped explosives.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that departing Russian troops were creating a “catastrophic” situation for civilians by leaving mines around homes, abandoned equipment and “even the bodies of those killed.” His claims could not be independently verified.

Ukrainian troops took up positions in the town of Bucha, and were stationed at the entrance of Antonov Airport in Hostomel after retaking territory from Russian forces.

In Bucha, AP reporters counted at least 6 bodies of civilians scattered along a street and in the front yard of a house. Ukrainian soldiers, backed by a column of tanks and armored vehicles, attached cables to the bodies and pulled them off the street for fear they may be booby-trapped. Soldiers also cleared barricades and inspected suspicious objects, placing red rags on remnants of unexploded ordnance to draw attention to the possibility of explosions.

Residents of the town said the civilians were killed by Russian soldiers without apparent provocation.

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Ukraine and its Western allies reported mounting evidence of Russia withdrawing its forces from around Kyiv and building its troop strength in eastern Ukraine. The visible shift did not mean the country faced a reprieve from more than five weeks of war or that the more than 4 million refugees who have fled Ukraine will return soon.

CAIRO — The Muslim holy month of Ramadan — when the faithful fast from dawn to dusk — began at sunrise Saturday in much of the Middle East, where Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sent energy and food prices soaring.

The conflict cast a pall over Ramadan, when large gatherings over meals and family celebrations are a tradition. Many had hoped for a more cheerful Ramadan after the coronavirus pandemic blocked the world's 2 billion Muslims from many rituals the past two years.

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, however, millions of people in the Middle East are now wondering where their next meals will come from. The skyrocketing prices are affecting people whose lives were already upended by conflict, displacement and poverty from Lebanon, Iraq and Syria to Sudan and Yemen.

Ukraine and Russia account for a third of global wheat and barley exports, which Middle East countries rely on to feed millions of people who subsist on subsidized bread and bargain noodles. They are also top exporters of other grains and sunflower seed oil used for cooking.

Opposition lawmakers in Sri Lanka protest state of emergency

By KRISHAN FRANCIS Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Opposition lawmakers in Sri Lanka on Sunday marched in the capital, Colombo, defying the president's move to impose a nationwide curfew and state of emergency after protests blaming the government for an economic crisis swelled.

Internet users were also unable to access Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp and other social media platforms on Sunday. They had been used to organize protests calling for President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to resign, saying he is responsible for the country's deepening economic woes.

Netblocks, a global internet monitor, confirmed that network data collected from over 100 vantage points across Sri Lanka showed the restrictions coming into effect across multiple providers from midnight.

Sri Lanka is under a nationwide curfew from Saturday night until Monday morning after Rajapaksa assumed emergency powers at midnight Friday. More protests were being planned throughout the country on Sunday as anger over shortages of essential foods, fuel and long power cuts boiled over.

The emergency declaration by Rajapaksa gives him wide powers to preserve public order, suppress mutiny, riot or civil disturbances or for the maintenance of essential supplies. Under the decree, the president can authorize detentions, seizure of property and search of premises. He can also change or suspend any law except the constitution.

The lawmakers marched toward Colombo's main square, shouting slogans and carrying placards that read "Stop Suppression" and "Gota go home." Gota is a shortened version of the president's first name.

Armed soldiers and police officers set up barricades on the road leading to the square, which was built to commemorate the country's independence from Britain in 1948.

"This is unconstitutional," opposition leader Sajith Premadasa told troops who prevented the lawmakers from walking to the square. "You are violating the law. Please think of the people who are suffering. Why are you protecting a government like this?"

Another lawmaker, Nalin Bandara, said: "How long can they rule under emergency? The first instance when the curfew is lifted, people are going to be back on the streets."

Sri Lanka faces huge debt obligations and dwindling foreign reserves, and its struggle to pay for imports has caused a lack of basic supplies. People wait in long lines for gas, and power is cut for several hours daily because there's not enough fuel to operate power plants and dry weather has sapped hydropower capacity.

The island nation's economic woes are blamed on a failure of successive governments to diversify exports,

instead relying on traditional cash sources like tea, garments and tourism, and on a culture of consuming imported goods.

The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a heavy blow to the economy with the government estimating a loss of \$14 billion in the last two years. Protesters also point to mismanagement — Sri Lanka has immense foreign debt after borrowing heavily on projects that don't earn money. Its foreign debt repayment obligations are around \$7 billion for this year alone.

The crisis has hit people from all walks of life. Middle class professionals and business people who would normally not take part in street protests have been holding nightly rallies with candles and placards in many parts of the country.

Pakistan president dissolves Parliament at PM's request

By KATHY GANNON and MUNIR AHMED Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan's president dissolved Parliament on Sunday setting the stage for early elections after the prime minister sidestepped a no-confidence move earlier in the day.

Imran Khan asked President Arif Alvi to dissolve the National Assembly, or law-making lower house of Parliament, accusing his political opposition of working with the United States to overthrow his government.

Pakistan's constitution calls for the establishment of an interim government to see the country toward elections, which are to be held within 90 days. According to the constitution the interim government is to be established with input from the opposition.

Khan's political opponents have called a decision by the Parliament's deputy speaker to throw out their no-confidence resolution illegal and vowed to go to the Supreme Court.

The battle between Khan, a cricket star turned conservative Islamic leader, and his political opposition has mired the nation in political turmoil.

The deputy speaker threw out the opposition's no-confidence resolution after Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry accused the opposition of colluding with a foreign power to stage a "regime change."

Khan, who was not in Parliament, went on national television to say he would ask Pakistan's president to dissolve the body and hold elections.

"I ask people to prepare for the next elections. Thank God, a conspiracy to topple the government has failed," Khan said in his address.

The opposition arrived in Parliament ready to vote Khan out of power. They needed a simple majority of 172 votes in Pakistan's 342-seat Parliament to unseat Khan, a cricket star turned conservative Islamic politician. Khan's small but key coalition partners along with 17 of his own party members joined the opposition to oust him.

The political turmoil also caused the country's security agencies to lock down the capital of Islamabad.

Giant metal containers blocked roads and entrances to the capital's diplomatic enclave and to Parliament and other sensitive government installations in the capital. A defiant Khan had called for supporters to stage demonstrations countrywide.

Khan has accused the opposition of being in cahoots with the United States to unseat him, saying America wants him gone over his foreign policy choices that often favor China and Russia. Khan has also been a strident opponent of America's war on terror and Pakistan's partnership in that war with Washington.

Khan has circulated a memo which he insists provides proof that Washington conspired with Pakistan's opposition to unseat him because America wants "me, personally, gone ... and everything would be forgiven."

Political chaos also spread to the country's largest Punjab province where it is set to vote for a new chief minister. Khan's choice faced a tough challenge and his opponents claimed they had enough votes to install their choice.

With 60% of Pakistan's 220 million people living in Punjab, it is considered the most powerful of the country's four provinces. Also on Sunday the government announced the dismissal of the provincial governor, whose role is largely ceremonial and is chosen by the federal government. But it further deepened the political turmoil in Pakistan.

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Pakistan's main opposition parties, whose ideologies span the spectrum from left to right to radically religious, have been rallying for Khan's ouster almost since he was elected in 2018.

Khan's win was mired in controversy amid widespread accusations that Pakistan's powerful army helped his Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (Justice) Party to victory.

Asfandyar Mir, a senior expert with the Washington-based U.S. Institute of Peace, said the military's involvement in the 2018 polls undermined Khan's legitimacy from the outset.

"The movement against Imran Khan's government is inseparable from his controversial rise to power in the 2018 election, which was manipulated by the army to push Khan over the line," said Mir. "That really undermined the legitimacy of the electoral exercise and created the grounds for the current turmoil."

Pakistan's military has directly ruled Pakistan for more than half of its 75-year history, overthrowing successive democratically elected governments. For the remainder of that time it has indirectly manipulated elected governments from the sidelines.

The opposition has also accused Khan of economic mismanagement, blaming him for rising prices and high inflation. Still, Khan's government is credited with maintaining a foreign reserve account of \$18 billion and bringing in a record \$29 billion last year from overseas Pakistanis.

Khan's anti-corruption reputation is credited with encouraging expatriate Pakistanis to send money home. His government has also received international praise for its handling of the COVID-19 crisis and implementing so-called "smart lockdowns" rather than countrywide shutdowns. As a result, several of Pakistan's key industries, such as construction, have survived.

Khan's leadership style has often been criticized as confrontational.

"Khan's biggest failing has been his insistence on remaining a partisan leader to the bitter end," said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the Washington-based Wilson Center.

"He hasn't been willing to extend a hand across the aisle to his rivals," said Kugelman. "He's remained stubborn and unwilling to make important compromises. As a result, he's burned too many bridges at a moment when he badly needs all the help he can get."

Khan's insistence there is U.S. involvement in attempts to oust him exploits a deep-seated mistrust among many in Pakistan of U.S. intentions, particularly following 9/11, said Mir.

Washington has often berated Pakistan for doing too little to fight Islamic militants even as thousands of Pakistanis have died in militant attacks and the army has lost more than 5,000 soldiers. Pakistan has been attacked for aiding Taliban insurgents while also being asked to bring them to the peace table.

"The fact that it has such easy traction in Pakistan speaks to some of the damage U.S. foreign policy has done in the post 9/11 era in general and in Pakistan in particular," said Mir. "There is a reservoir of anti-American sentiment in the country, which can be instrumentalized easily by politicians like Khan."

Shanghai lockdown triggers complaints as COVID cases rise

BEIJING (AP) — COVID-19 cases in China's largest city of Shanghai are still rising with millions isolated at home under a sweeping lockdown, as the draconian "zero tolerance" approach to the pandemic increasingly draws complaints from residents fed up with the restrictions.

Health officials on Sunday reported 438 confirmed cases over the previous 24 hours, along with 7,788 asymptomatic ones. Both figures were up slightly from the day before, while the northeastern province of Jilin posted a combined 4,455 cases Sunday, also marking an increase from Saturday.

While small by the standards of some countries, the daily increases are some of the largest since the virus was first detected in the central city of Wuhan in late 2019.

Shanghai with its 26 million people last week began a two-stage lockdown, with residents of the eastern Pudong section supposed to be allowed to leave their homes Friday, while their neighbors in the western Puxi section underwent their own four-day isolation period.

Despite that assurance, millions in Pudong continue to be confined to their homes amid complaints over food deliveries and the availability of medications and health services.

Notices delivered to residents said they were required to self-test for COVID-19 daily and take precau-

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tions including wearing masks at home and avoiding contact with family members — measures not widely enforced since the early days of the pandemic.

While Wuhan endured a 76-day lockdown in 2020 with relatively little complaint, Shanghai residents — many of whom were in isolation even before last week's lockdown began — appear to be growing increasingly fed up with the measures and methods being used to enforce them.

Although coverage in China's entirely state-controlled media remains overwhelmingly positive, complaints have been appearing online, including in the form of videos and sound recordings purporting to show heavy-handed practices by officials and volunteers and alleging that sound medical advice has been ignored in favor of political expediency.

"Whereas there was little societal resistance to the lockdown once it was imposed in Wuhan, resistance in Shanghai is palpable now," Dali Yang, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago tweeted on Sunday.

Given that the vast majority of cases in Shanghai are not life threatening, "it is not surprised that the imposition of the lockdown and forced quarantine of the infected in harsh conditions are meeting resistance," Yang tweeted.

A city official last week apologized in response to complaints over the government's handling of the lockdown, and a vice premier made sweeping demands for improvements during a tour of Shanghai on Saturday.

Sun Chunlan, who sits on the ruling Communist Party's Politburo, urged "resolute and swift moves to stem the spread of COVID-19 in Shanghai in the shortest time possible," the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

However, Sun stressed "unswerving adherence" to China's hard-line "zero-COVID" approach, mandating lockdowns, forced isolation of all suspected cases and mass testing, even while acknowledging the social and economic toll that is taking.

"It is an arduous task and huge challenge to combat the omicron variant while maintaining the normal operation of core functions in a megacity," Sun said.

She called for safeguarding key industries and institutions and the functioning of supply and industrial chains in the commercial hub, along with ensuring "people's basic living conditions and normal medical needs."

State media reports indicate president and Communist Party leader Xi Jinping is directing the continuing tough approach, while seeking to avoid further damage to the sputtering economy and ensure overall stability ahead of a key party congress expected for November.

Despite the spike in infections, China has recorded no new COVID-19 deaths since March 20th, when two were added for a total 4,638. China's vaccination rate is above 87% — although significantly lower among seniors — and omicron is known to be more infectious while the illness it brings on is typically more mild than with the earlier delta variant.

Serbs vote in triple election set to keep populists in power

By JOVANA GEC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Voters in Serbia cast ballots Sunday in a triple election likely to keep in power a populist government in the Balkan country that has refused to impose sanctions on Russia over the war in Ukraine.

Some 6.5 million voters are choosing the president, a new parliament and local authorities in the capital, Belgrade, and over a dozen other towns and municipalities.

Opinion surveys ahead of the vote have predicted that President Aleksandar Vucic will win another five-year term and that his right-wing Serbian Progressive Party will yet again dominate the 250-member assembly.

But opposition groups stand a chance to win the majority in Belgrade, analysts say. This would deal a serious blow to the populists' decade-old unchallenged rule in Serbia.

Vucic, a former ultranationalist who has boasted of close ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin, has

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sought to portray himself as a guarantor of stability amid the turmoil raging in Europe.

After voting in Belgrade, Vucic said he expected Serbia to continue on the path of "stability, tranquility and peace."

"I believe in a significant and convincing victory and I believe everyone will get what they deserve, according to how much they worked and, understandably, in accordance with the expectations of the citizens for the future," he said.

In a country that went through a series of wars in the 1990s and a NATO bombing in 1999, fears of a conflict spilling over have played into Vucic's hands.

Though Serbia is formally seeking European Union entry, Vucic has fostered close ties with Russia and China, counting on the Serbs' resentment of the West over the NATO air war.

Serbia has supported a U.N. resolution that condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but Belgrade has not joined the sanctions against Moscow, a historic Slavic ally.

Beleaguered opposition groups have also mostly refrained from publicly advocating a tougher line on Moscow. Russia has supported Serbia's claim on Kosovo, a former province that declared Western-backed independence in 2008.

After boycotting the previous vote in 2020, main opposition parties have said this vote is also far from free and fair because of Vucic's domination over the mainstream media and the state institutions.

Vucic's main opponent in the presidential election comes from a centrist-conservative coalition, United for Victory of Serbia, which comprises the main opposition parties.

Gen. Zdravko Ponos, a Western-educated former army chief of staff, is hoping to push Vucic into a second round in the presidential ballot.

"These elections are going to (bring) serious change in Serbia," Ponos said after casting his ballot. "I hope citizens of Serbia are going to take (a) chance today."

In the runup to the vote, reports have emerged of ballots being sent to addresses for people who don't live there, prompting opposition warnings of potential fraud.

Ruling populists have denied manipulating ballots or pressuring voters.

Their standing in the capital has been lower than the rest of the country due partly to a number of corruption-plagued construction projects that have devastated the city's urban core.

A green-left coalition, Moramo, or We Must, is running in the election for the first time, campaigning on the discontent in Belgrade and on anger over Serbia's numerous environmental problems.

The group has drawn thousands of people to protests against lithium mining in Serbia and to demand cleaner air, rivers and land.

Since his party came to power in 2012, Vucic has served as defense minister, prime minister and president.

On the eve of the election, some voters in Belgrade said they would like to see a change, at least in the capital city. Others were skeptical that this was possible.

"Honestly, I think the opposition stands no chance," said Srdjan Kovacevic, a resident of Belgrade.

Predrag Rebic said he too expects the central government and the president to remain the same.

"The (Belgrade) mayor will change, that's what I expect," he said.

Ukraine sees openings as Russia fixed on besieged Mariupol

By NEBI QENA and YURAS KARMAŃAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Residents of Ukraine's besieged southeastern coast awaited possible evacuation Sunday as the country's president said Russia's obsession with capturing a key port city had left its forces weakened and created opportunities for his military.

Two loud explosions were heard in Odesa on the Black Sea, and black smoke was seen rising above the city, which is where Ukraine's navy is headquartered. It is west of Mariupol, a smaller port that has been under attack for almost the entire war and rescuers are desperate to reach.

The Odesa city council said in a brief statement that a morning airstrike set off fires in some areas. The

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Russian military said hours later that it used ships and aircraft-fired missiles to strike an oil processing plant and fuel depots that were supplying Ukrainian troops.

The city council said Ukraine's air defense shot down some missiles before they hit the city. Ukrainian military spokesman Vladyslav Nazarov said there were no casualties from the attack.

In Mariupol, conditions remained dire and prospects for escape uncertain. The surrounded city, which has been brutalized by some of the war's worst attacks, reported weeks ago that water, food, fuel and medicine were running out. About 100,000 people are believed to still be there, less than a quarter of the city's prewar population of 430,000.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said it hoped a team it sent to help evacuate residents would reach Mariupol on Sunday. Ukrainian authorities said Russia agreed days ago to allow safe passage from the city, but similar agreements have broken down repeatedly under continued shelling.

Mariupol is in the mostly Russian-speaking Donbas region, where Moscow-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian troops for eight years. Its capture would create an unbroken land corridor from Russia to Crimea, which Moscow seized from Ukraine in 2014.

With Mariupol squarely in Russia's crosshairs, Ukraine insists it has gained a leg up elsewhere in the country. As his country's troops retook territory north of the capital of Kyiv from departing Russian troops, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called on all Ukrainians to do whatever they could "to foil the enemy's tactics and weaken its capabilities."

"Peace will not be the result of any decisions the enemy makes somewhere in Moscow. There is no need to entertain empty hopes that they will simply leave our land. We can only have peace by fighting," Zelenskyy said late Saturday.

Zelenskyy and Ukraine's Western allies believe Russia has shifted its forces from the capital region and the country's north in order to build strength in the east and south. The Ukrainian leader again urged the West to supply his military with warplanes and more anti-missile systems.

"Every Russian missile that hits our cities and every bomb dropped on our people, on our children, only adds black paint to the history that will describe everyone on whom the decision depended - the decision of whether to help Ukraine with modern weapons," Zelenskyy said.

While the geography of the battlefield morphed, little changed for many Ukrainians more than five weeks into a war that has sent more than 4 million people fleeing the country as refugees and displaced millions more from their homes.

The regional governor in Kharkiv, said Sunday that Russian artillery and tanks performed over 20 strikes on Ukraine's second-largest city and its outskirts in the country's northeast over the past day. Gov. Oleh Synyehubov said a missile strike on the city of Lozovo wounded four people and that Russian tanks bombarded a hospital in the town of Balakliia.

Zelenskyy alleged Saturday that Russian troops have left mines around homes, abandoned equipment and even the bodies of the dead as they withdraw from around Kyiv. Those claims could not be independently verified, but Ukrainian troops were seen heeding the warning.

In Bucha, northwest of the capital, Associated Press journalists watched as Ukrainian soldiers, backed by a column of tanks and other armored vehicles, used cables to drag bodies off of a street from a distance for fear they may have been booby-trapped. Locals said the dead — AP counted at least six — were civilians killed without provocation by departing Russian soldiers.

In towns and cities surrounding Kyiv, signs of fierce fighting were everywhere in the wake of the Russian redeployment. Destroyed armored vehicles from both armies lay in streets and fields along with scattered military gear.

Ukrainian troops were stationed at the entrance to Antonov Airport in the suburb of Hostomel, demonstrating control of the runway that Russia tried to storm in the first days of the war.

Inside the compound, the Mriya, one of the biggest planes ever built, lay wrecked underneath a hangar pockmarked with holes from the February attack.

The head of Ukraine's delegation in talks with Russia said Moscow's negotiators informally agreed to most of a draft proposal discussed during face-to-face talks in Istanbul this week, but no written confirmation

has been provided.

The Ukrainian negotiator, Davyd Arakhamia said on Ukrainian TV that he hoped the was developed enough so that the two countries' presidents can meet to discuss it.

Ukrainian authorities warned that Russia's focus on eastern Ukraine did not mean Kyiv and other cities wouldn't become targets again. In his evening address Saturday, Zelenskyy called for his people to do whatever they can to ensure the country's survival, even by engaging in acts as simple as showing each other kindness.

"When a nation is defending itself in a war of annihilation, when it is a question of life or death of millions, there are no unimportant things. ... And everyone can contribute to a victory for all," the president said.

Drug shortages persist in Russia after start of Ukraine war

By The Associated Press undefined

First came the warnings, in messages among friends and families and on social media, to stock up on vital drugs in Russia before supplies were affected by crippling Western sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine.

Then, some drugs indeed became harder to find at pharmacies in Moscow and other cities.

"Not a single pharmacy in the city has it now," a resident of Kazan told The Associated Press in late March about a blood thinner her father needs.

Experts and health authorities in Russia say the drug shortages are temporary — due to panic-buying and logistical difficulties for suppliers from the sanctions — but some remain worried that high-quality medicines will keep disappearing in the Russian market.

"Most likely there will be shortages. How catastrophic it will be, I don't know," said Dr. Alexey Erlikh, head of the cardiac intensive care unit in Moscow Hospital No. 29, and a professor at the Moscow-based Pirogov Medical University.

Reports that Russians could not find certain medications in pharmacies started surfacing in early March, shortly after Moscow unleashed a war on Ukraine, and sweeping sanctions left Russia increasingly isolated from the rest of the world.

Patient's Monitor, a patients' rights group in the Russian region of Dagestan on the Caspian Sea, began getting complaints in the second week of March.

Ziyautdin Uvaysov, head of the group, told AP he personally checked with several state-run pharmacies in the region on the availability of 10 most-wanted medications and "they didn't have a large number of these."

Uvaysov added that when he asked about when supplies would be restocked, the pharmacies replied that "there aren't any and it's unclear when there will be."

Despite assurances from authorities that hoarding of supplies was to blame for the quickly emptying shelves, reports about shortages persisted throughout March.

Vrachi.Rf, one of Russia's biggest online communities for medical workers, surveyed more than 3,000 doctors in mid-March, and they said they had run into shortages of more than 80 medications: anti-inflammatory, gastrointestinal, antiepileptic and anticonvulsant drugs, as well as antidepressants and antipsychotics.

About a dozen people contacted by the AP in different cities in late March said they had spent days searching for certain thyroid medications, types of insulin or even a popular pain-relieving syrup for children. Some said they were unable to find them at all.

"Patients I treat have lost some blood pressure medications," Erlikh said. "And some doctors I know are reporting problems with certain very expensive, very important medications (used in) certain surgical procedures."

Russian Health Minister Mikhail Murashko has repeatedly given assurances that drug availability is not a problem in the country and has blamed any shortages on panic-buying. He said the demand for certain drugs has spiked tenfold in recent weeks, and he has urged Russians not to hoard the medications.

Experts agree that panic-buying has played a role in creating drug shortages.

"People rushed to stock up, and in some cases, supplies that were supposed to last a year or a year

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and a half were bought out within a month," Nikolay Bespalov, development director of the RNC Pharma analytical company, told AP.

Bespalov also pointed to logistical problems that occurred early in the crisis. While major Western pharmaceutical companies pledged not to withdraw vital medications from the Russian market, sanctions cut Russia's key banks from the SWIFT financial messaging system, hindering international payments. Dozens of countries halted air traffic with Russia, disrupting supply chains.

The expert stressed the logistical issues have been largely resolved, but panic-buying, prompted by fears that foreign companies will halt supplies, may continue fueling shortages for some time.

"Clearly, until the emotions calm down, it will continue," Bespalov said.

Local news sites — from Vladimir, just east of Moscow, to the Kemerovo region in Siberia — reported shortages of various medications in the final days of March amid continued panic-buying.

Russia's health care watchdog Roszdravnadzor, however, said in a statement Friday that "the situation on the drug market is gradually returning to normal, panic-buying of pharmaceuticals is decreasing."

Erlikh, the cardiologist, pointed to already-existing problems with quality medications in Russia, which according to some estimates imports up to 40% of its drugs.

After authorities launched an import substitution policy to counter sanctions over the 2014 annexation of Crimea and to promote its own medications over foreign-made ones, shortages of certain imported drugs became a problem.

The policy outlined a wide range of preferences to Russian businesses and eventually made it unprofitable for foreign pharmaceutical companies to supply some of their expensive, high-quality drugs to Russia.

In 2015, state procurement of drugs for hospitals and state-funded clinics, which account for up to 80% of Russia's pharmaceutical market, became subject to the "three's a crowd" rule, which excluded foreign businesses if at least two Russian companies were bidding for a contract.

The government also kept adding more drugs to the "vital medicines" list -- a registry of over 800 essential drugs, for which the authorities set obligatory — and relatively low — prices. Companies can apply for changing the set price once a year, but the process is long, heavily bureaucratic and doesn't lead to a guaranteed result.

"We have already been gradually losing one important original medication after another. Generics are taking their place, and while there are some rather good ones made in Europe, there are also some dubious ones made in Russia," Erlikh said.

"Of course, when there is no original medication, a generic is better than nothing. But it is a situation of (deliberately) lowering the bar, it is not a good way to live," he added.

French far-right leader Le Pen softens image for election

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French nationalist leader Marine Le Pen has softened her rhetoric and her image to broaden her appeal in next week's presidential election — but is under threat from a provocative rival who has broken her monopoly as the watchdog of the country's identity that they claim is under threat.

For more than a decade, Le Pen has been known for her fierce anti-immigration stance, seeing herself as standing guard at the parapets of French civilization. Now she is honing in on consumers' buying power, the top concern for voters.

"I obviously consider that immigration and insecurity are serious problems which need urgent answers, but there's not just that," said Le Pen, head of the National Rally party, during a TV show featuring voters' questions. "I worry about making ends meet as much as the end of France."

Meanwhile, Eric Zemmour, 63, a political novice running under the banner of his newly created Reconquest! party, is now portraying himself as the protector of old France, with bold proposals on immigration and Islam. He has proposed a "Remigration Ministry," equipped with airplanes to expedite the expulsions of what he says are undesirable migrants.

Their rivalry illustrates France's increasing tilt toward the hard right and how that has set the agenda

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for the presidential election, held in two rounds on April 10 and 24. While polls suggest centrist President Emmanuel Macron is the front-runner, nearly half of respondents say they're ready to vote for a far-right candidate in the decisive runoff.

And that's despite the fact that Zemmour, a TV pundit who models himself after former U.S. President Donald Trump, has been convicted three times of inciting racial or religious hatred.

Zemmour, who said he entered the race to "save France," has made the conspiracy theory known as the "great replacement" the centerpiece of his campaign. The term evokes a false white supremacist claim that immigrants and other people of color — notably Muslims — are supplanting natives of Western countries and will one day erase Christian civilization.

He recently alleged that without a stop to immigration, France will become "an African nation, an Islamic nation" in 10-20 years. A large majority of French people are white Catholics, and immigration evolution statistics contradict his claim.

Zemmour's political goal is to create a "union of the right," bringing together conservatives, including traditional Catholics, and far-right parties. Le Pen, who also decries "migratory submersion," says her goal is the "union of France."

Polls of voters suggest that Le Pen's focus on pocketbook issues may be working. They show her consistently second to Macron, with Zemmour in third or fourth place. That could put her in a runoff against Macron, a repeat of their 2017 standoff, which she lost 66%-34%.

This time, the two far-right candidates together are drawing more support than the centrist president, making their supporters a threat to the established order.

A low voter turnout could render useless all pre-election calculations. Le Pen's party is still stinging from her party's failure in last summer's regional balloting, blamed on a turnout of only 33% of voters in the first round.

Le Pen's emphasis on buying power is in line with her work to detoxify her party since taking the reins from her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the firebrand leader of what was then the National Front. She changed the party name and then expelled him after he reiterated antisemitic remarks for which he was once convicted.

Her father, who now backs her new presidential bid, once compared her to Diet Coke, saying that her ridding the party of hard-liners was like diluting its values.

A batch of officials and their supporters have deserted her for the more extreme Zemmour. She slammed most of them with insults — except for her niece, Marion Marechal, a popular former lawmaker who has returned to politics to help Zemmour.

"Poor Marion," Le Pen said, lamenting Marechal's role as a "life preserver" for Zemmour.

Sylvain Crepon, a National Rally specialist, said Zemmour doesn't pose a serious threat. He says it is Le Pen who embodies nationalist ideas, and "in the end, voters prefer the original to the copy."

The 53-year-old Le Pen, who represents northern France and is in her third presidential race, has adopted a less-aggressive tone, and she has all but ditched her signature navy blue wardrobe in favor of pastels.

On policy issues, she is stressing concerns that speak to those struggling to make ends meet. She also has dropped her earlier goals of quitting the European Union and abandoning the euro.

But her nationalist strain remains firm. If elected, Le Pen plans drastic measures — to be put to a vote in a nationwide referendum — to contain immigration and "eradicate" political Islam. Among them is ending the policy of family regrouping, which allows immigrants to take up French residence if a close relative is a resident. Like Zemmour, she would expel delinquent foreigners and those who have not been employed for at least a year.

She says she honors the religion of Islam but vows to ban Muslims from wearing headscarves on the street, calling them an "Islamist uniform."

In public appearances, however, the spotlight is often on the everyday problems of the middle class and the working class, her base of support. Her platform calls for measures to soften the blow of rising prices, like slashing taxes on energy bills from 20% to 5.5%. Le Pen promises to put 150-200 euros per

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month back in people's pockets.

"What she has understood is subjects that interest the French that are not ideological topics" like paying bills, said Jean-Yves Camus, a leading expert on the far right.

"Eric Zemmour says that the only important subject is the end of France," Camus said. "The French don't necessarily believe that France is finished. And if you want France not to be finished, you have to give it buying power."

For Macron, Le Pen is the candidate to beat.

The Macron camp has worried openly about an electoral "accident," perhaps through low turnout by moderate voters, that could put Le Pen in power.

Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire decried Le Pen's "stupefying metamorphosis."

"Don't let yourselves believe that we're the elite and she is the people," the French press quoted him as saying on a visit to Normandy.

Romain Lopez, mayor of the southwestern town of Moissac and a member of Le Pen's party, says he'll vote for Zemmour in the first round but will support Le Pen in the runoff if Zemmour fails.

"Zemmour gave himself a glass ceiling with his excesses of language," said Lopez, citing the policies of "remigration."

Lopez is looking past the election, when he believes a new party will emerge on the right with a major role for Le Pen's niece, Marechal.

For far-right expert Camus, Zemmour has helped Le Pen by making her appear more palatable.

A presidential candidate must bring voters together, and that's what Le Pen has done, he said.

"At some point, you are obliged, as the French say, to put water in your wine, accept compromise," Camus said. "You're obliged to make proposals that unite not 40% of voters but 50.1%."

Billie Eilish, Olivia Rodrigo could score big at Grammys

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Several Grammy Awards performers such as Billie Eilish, Olivia Rodrigo and Jon Batiste have a chance to carve their names in the show's history books Sunday.

Through her song "Happier Than Ever," Eilish could become the first artist ever to win record of the year three times in a row, and the only artist along with Paul Simon to take home the award three times. She's in position to join Adele as the only artists to ever win three major categories — record, song and album of the year — twice. She previously won for "Bad Guy" and "Everything I Wanted."

Trevor Noah returns for a second time as Grammys host. The ceremony shifted from Los Angeles to Las Vegas because of rising COVID-19 cases and the omicron variant in January, with organizers citing "too many risks" to hosting the performance-filled show at the time. It airs live beginning at 8 p.m. EDT on CBS and Paramount+.

If Eilish wins in all her seven nominated categories, she'll be the woman with the most Grammys won in a single year (H.E.R., Doja Cat and Rodrigo could do the same). But that might be a tough feat with Eilish facing some stiff competition for the show's top prize — album of the year — which was expanded to 10 nominees.

Eilish is up for best music film with her concert documentary "Happier Than Ever: A Love Letter to Los Angeles." But in that same category includes Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson's "Summer of Soul," which recently won an Oscar for best documentary.

Even if Eilish comes away with six wins, she'll be tied with Beyoncé and Adele — which is not bad company to be in.

Rodrigo has an opportunity to join Eilish and Christopher Cross as the only artists to win all four major categories (best new artist, album, record and song of the year). The 19-year-old "drivers license" singer could be following Eilish's remarkable record by becoming the second-youngest album of the year winner with "Sour."

The only person who could win the most Grammys in one night is Jon Batiste, who enters the awards

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with a leading 11 nominations. If Batiste wins in eight categories, he will tie Michael Jackson and rock band Santana for the record.

Batiste, a multi-genre performer and Oscar winner, might have a hard time pulling that off with the competition in record and album of the year categories. He could pull away in the jazz, American roots music and classical fields.

H.E.R., who won song of the year last year for "I Can't Breathe," could go back-to-back. She's nominated this year for the soulful "Fight for You," whose poignant lyrics from the "Judas and the Black Messiah" soundtrack were written by H.E.R., producer D'Mile and singer Tiara Thomas. It won an Academy Award for best original song last year.

The awards will be without several big names: Drake and The Weeknd both decided to not take part in the Grammys, at all. Ye, who changed his name from Kanye West, said he was told that his act was pulled from the show.

It might be a bittersweet moment for the Foo Fighters following the recent death of its drummer Taylor Hawkins. The rock band could extend their record for most best rock album wins with five for "Medicine at Midnight."

Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion will battle to see who becomes the first woman to win best rap performance as a solo artist. Stallion, who won the award with Beyoncé last year, is nominated for her song "Thot S(asterisk)(asterisk)(asterisk)," while Cardi B is up for her crossover hit "Up."

Mickey Guyton was the first Black woman to be nominated in best country solo performance last year, and now she's back in the category again. If she wins, she would be the first Black woman to get that award.

In rap, Jay-Z could extend his record as the most awarded rapper of all time with 23 wins. He's up for three nomination — two in the best rap song category for his songwriting on DMX'S "Bath Salts" and Kanye West's "Jail." He's also up for album of the year for his guest appearance on West's "Donda."

A healthy dose of performers will hit the stage at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas, including Silk Sonic, H.E.R., Chris Stapleton, Cynthia Erivo, Jack Harlow, Nas, Leslie Odom Jr. and Brothers Osborne.

Artists competing with Eilish for album of the year include Rodrigo, Jon Batiste, Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, Doja Cat, H.E.R., Taylor Swift, Lil Nas X and Kanye West.

On the production side, Serban Ghenea could tie Al Schmitt as the engineer-mixer with the most Grammys won with 20. He's won a total 18 trophies in his career and enters the awards with five nominations for his work on Doja Cat's "Planet Her" and Lil Nas X's "Montero." Ghenea also could extend his record as the engineer-mixer with the most album of the year wins at five.

Although 80-plus awards will be handed out — roughly 10 during the live telecast and the rest during the pre-ceremony — viewers are most likely watching for the performances.

Secret intelligence has unusually public role in Ukraine war

By JILL LAWLESS and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The war in Ukraine is the conflict where spies came in from the cold and took center stage.

Since Russia invaded its neighbor in late February, intelligence agencies in the U.S. and Britain have been remarkably willing to go public with their secret intelligence assessments of what is happening on the battlefield — and inside the Kremlin.

The U.S. this week declassified intelligence findings claiming Russian President Vladimir Putin is being misinformed about his military's poor performance in Ukraine by advisers scared to tell him the truth. On Thursday a British spy chief said demoralized Russian troops were refusing to carry out orders and sabotaging their own equipment.

Jeremy Fleming, who heads Britain's electronic intelligence agency GCHQ, made the comments in a public speech where he said the "pace and scale" at which secret intelligence is being released "really is unprecedented."

Mark Galeotti, a Russia expert at University College London, agreed that the very public intelligence

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campaign "reflects the fact that we now live in a different age, politically and internationally. And this is a different kind of war."

Officials say the stream of declassified intelligence — which includes regular briefings to journalists in Washington and London and daily Twitter updates from Britain's defense ministry — has several aims. Partly it's to let Putin know he is being watched, and to make him question what he's being told. It's also designed to embolden the Russian military to tell Putin the truth, and to convey to the Russian public that they have been lied to about the war.

The U.S. and Britain also have released intelligence assessments in a bid to deter Russian actions. That was the case with recent warnings Russia might be preparing to use chemical weapons in Ukraine.

It's all part of a closely coordinated trans-Atlantic strategy that has been in the works for months.

Biden administration officials say they decided to aggressively share intelligence and coordinate messaging with key allies, including Britain, as U.S. concerns about Russian troop movements in autumn 2021 put the intelligence community on high alert.

In early November, President Joe Biden dispatched CIA director William Burns to Moscow to warn that the U.S. was fully aware of Russian troop movements. The White House has typically been tight-lipped about the director's travels, but the Biden administration calculated that in this situation they needed to advertise the visit far and wide. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow announced that Burns had met with top Kremlin officials shortly after his trip was over.

Soon after Burns' Moscow mission, U.S. officials decided they needed to accelerate intelligence sharing.

Officials shared sensitive intelligence with other members of the Five Eyes alliance — Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand — and also with Ukraine. Director of national intelligence Avril Haines was dispatched to Brussels to brief NATO members on intelligence underlying growing American concerns that Russia seemed intent on invasion, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive issue.

Some allies and analysts were skeptical, with memories lingering of past intelligence failings, like the false claim Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction that was used to justify the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

Late last year, France and Germany led a group of European countries that appeared to be seeing similar military intelligence as the U.S. and Britain, but were less convinced that an invasion of Ukraine was imminent. At NATO, Germany initially blocked the use of a system for helping Ukraine to acquire certain military equipment. France and Germany also blocked NATO from launching an early crisis planning system in response to the buildup, before relenting in December.

This week, French media reported that the head of France's military intelligence agency, which failed to anticipate the Russian invasion, has been removed from his post.

Eric Vidaud's departure comes amid soul-searching among France's leadership about why it was taken by surprise by the war — which was particularly embarrassing for President Emmanuel Macron, who speaks regularly with Putin. Some see Vidaud as a scapegoat, and note that his removal comes just ahead of this month's French presidential election.

In January, as Russia amassed troops near Ukraine's border, Britain's Foreign Office issued a statement alleging that Putin wanted to install a pro-Moscow regime in Ukraine. The U.K. said it was making the intelligence assessment public because of the "exceptional circumstances."

Russia's invasion on Feb. 24 largely silenced the doubters, and drew a unified response from NATO. The release of U.S. and British intelligence is partly designed to shore up that Western unity, officials and analysts say. Both Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson doubt Putin is serious about negotiating an end to the war and want to keep up the West's military and moral support of Ukraine.

The impact inside Russia is hard to measure. The U.S. official who spoke to the AP said the White House hopes divulging intelligence that Putin is misinformed could help prod the Russian leader to reconsider his options in Ukraine. But the publicity could also risk further isolating Putin or make him double down on his aim of restoring Russian prestige lost since the fall of the Soviet Union.

The official said Biden is in part shaped by a belief that "Putin is going to do what Putin is going to do," regardless of international efforts to deter him.

Galeotti said Western intelligence agencies likely don't know how much impact their efforts will have on Putin.

"But there's no harm in giving it a try," he said. "Because when it comes down to it, in this kind of intensely personalistic system (of government), if one line, or one particular notion, happens to get through and lodge itself in Putin's brain, then that's a really powerful result."

In war-torn Syria, a charity offers hope to kids with cancer

By OMAR SANADIKI Associated Press

DAMASCUS, SYria (AP) — At the children's cancer ward in a hospital in the Syrian capital of Damascus, children walk down brightly painted corridors, hooked up to IV needles delivering critical treatment into their bloodstream.

Nurses tend to babies and teenagers getting chemotherapy sit in reclining chairs. Other children, in a nearby playroom, draw and color to pass the time.

The beds fill up fast at the ward operated by BASMA, a private charity that supports children with cancer. Today, it is the biggest association across the war-shattered nation to offer full cancer diagnoses and treatment without charge — and for many among Syria's impoverished population, it comes down to either that or no treatment at all.

More than a decade of war has brought Syria's health care sector to its knees. With an ongoing economic crisis exacerbated by Western sanctions and a devastating currency crash, most families are struggling to survive.

Few can afford expensive cancer treatment. Hospitals, including Al-Bairouni hospital on the Harasta highway, just northeast of the Syrian capital, and the Children's Hospital in Damascus, face severe shortages of medicines and medical equipment.

Before the war, the Syrian government provided anticancer medication free of charge in its public oncology facilities. But since the conflict broke out in 2011, these services have been disrupted. Around half of the country's health care clinics have been destroyed or closed during the war, which has killed nearly half a million people and displaced half of the country's pre-war population. Oncology care saw a rapid decline.

"The doctor told us medicine is in short supply and we would have to secure most of it ourselves," said a woman from the coastal province of Latakia who identified herself by her nickname, Umm Hamzeh, meaning the mother of Hamzeh.

Her 14-year-old son was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia, an aggressive form of blood cancer in children.

"Life is very difficult," she added.

For her and many others, the BASMA-operated cancer units at Al-Bairouni and the Children's Hospital have been a rare sanctuary in a country exhausted by war and poverty.

"They welcomed us immediately, from the first day, and took care of everything," Umm Hamzeh said. In addition to treatment, the children's wards at the Al-Bairouni hospital offer accommodation for parents of children from far away provinces, as well as psychological care for both parents and children.

"The ongoing conflict and economic downturn have taken a devastating toll on children's access to health services in Syria for more than a decade, jeopardizing the lives of thousands with potentially treatable illnesses," said UNICEF's representative for Syria, Bo Viktor Nylund.

"Fighting and surviving cancer is no small feat in any country, but a conflict zone is truly the worst environment for children with cancer," Nylund added. He spoke last month, after receiving cancer drugs for more than 4,000 Syrian children, a donation from the Kuwait Fund.

BASMA opened the first specialized unit to diagnose and treat children with cancer in 2008, working with only 20 inpatient beds and able to offer services to eight outpatients at Al-Bairouni. At the height of the war, the hospital overlooked a front line between government-controlled Damascus and rebel-held

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suburbs. Most beds were empty as cancer care declined.

Now, there are 38 beds available and the charity hopes to expand to 72 beds by the end of the year, according to Suhair Boulad, chairperson of BASMA, which provides free treatment to about 650 children with cancer every year.

"We are struggling a lot to get these medications but thank God at BASMA, we didn't run out even one day," Boulad said.

"Syrian children are like any other children. They have the right to receive full treatment as needed," she added.

Krzyzewski K-O'd: North Carolina takes out coach, Duke 81-77

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — For the 48th time over 47 years of unparalleled coaching, Duke's Mike Krzyzewski took the slow walk to midcourt and shook the hand of the North Carolina coach who beat him.

After that, he found his wife, Mickie, and they made the slow, sad walk, hand-in-hand, off the Superdome floor. Saturday night's 81-77 setback in the national semifinal showdown between archrivals marked Coach K's last loss, and one of his toughest losses, too.

And thanks to the Tar Heels — those dadgum Tar Heels -- the 75-year-old coach will have plenty of time to get over it.

"I'm sure at some time, I'll deal with this in my own way," said the coach, who had announced before the start of the season that 2021-22 would be his last.

Krzyzewski's remarkable career came to gut-wrenching close after Caleb Love made a key 3-pointer and three late free throws to lift the Tar Heels to their thrill-a-minute victory.

This was the 258th, most consequential and maybe, just maybe, the very best meeting between these teams, whose arenas are separated by a scant 11 miles down on Tobacco Road.

The eighth-seeded Tar Heels (29-9), of all teams, pinned the 368th and final loss on Krzyzewski. He finished with 1202 wins. His lifetime record against North Carolina fell to 50-48. Losses No. 47 and 48 are ones Carolina fans will treasure forever. They were partying early into Sunday morning on Franklin Street in Chapel Hill. This latest win came exactly four weeks after the Tar Heels ruined the going-away party in Coach K's final home game at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

That loss hurt. "Unacceptable," he called it, still knowing there was time to regroup for one last run into March Madness. They made that run, but the last loss stopped that all in its tracks — one agonizing win short of a title game and a chance at his sixth championship.

Krzyzewski said he had a locker room full of crying players when it was over.

"It's not about me," he insisted. "Especially right now. I've said my entire career that I wanted my seasons to end where my team was either crying tears of joy or tears of sorrow. Because then you knew that they gave everything."

They gave everything all the way through the nip-and-tuck contest — neither team led by more than seven — that concluded with an edge-of-the-seat stretch run that Duke played without a timeout. When the final buzzer of his career blared, Krzyzewski shook the hand of Carolina's rookie coach, Hubert Davis.

Instead of Krzyzewski going for his sixth title, on Monday, Carolina will try to win its seventh. It will be Davis, Love, who led the Tar Heels with 28 points, and R.J. Davis, who scored 18, going against Kansas, which beat Villanova 81-65 earlier in the undercard.

"Dwelling on the two wins against Duke doesn't help us against Kansas," said Hubert Davis, who took over for Roy Williams this season and has now brought Carolina to its 12th title game.

Maybe not, but what a game — as good as any these teams have played in an ancient rivalry that has so-often determined conference titles, or, at the very least, bragging rights in a state where basketball is king. Their first-ever meeting in the NCAA Tournament, this one, featured 18 lead changes and 12 ties.

It also featured another breakout performance from Love, whose 28 points after an 0-for-4 start were one more than what he put up in the second half of a win last week against UCLA in the Sweet 16.

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"It means everything to me," Love said of his key 3 with 25 seconds left.

There was so much to talk about in this instant classic, one that Krzyzewski, clad in his blue pullover with a "D" embroidered on the chest, watched most of while perched on a stool situated on the sideline above the Duke bench.

At around the 2-minute mark, the teams traded three straight 3s. Wendell Moore Jr.'s 3-pointer with 1:19 left ended the flurry and gave Duke a 74-73 lead. It was the last lead of Krzyzewski's career.

R.J. Davis came back with two free throws, then after Duke's Mark Williams, in foul trouble all night, missed a pair from the line, Carolina worked the ball around the perimeter.

Tar Heels guard Leaky Black set a pick -- make that threw a block -- on Trevor Keels to free up Love, who drained a 3 from near the top for a 78-74 lead and what felt like breathing room in this one.

Love made three more free throws down the stretch, and then it was over. Krzyzewski and his wife walked off the floor together, same as they had after four wins during the run to his record 13th Final Four.

Near the other bench, Hubert Davis was crying again — just like Ol' Roy — much as he did last weekend when North Carolina punched its ticket to its record 21st Final Four.

"I felt like over the last two or three years, North Carolina wasn't relevant," said Davis, whose biggest win came a year to the date Williams announced his own retirement. "North Carolina should never be irrelevant. It should be front and center with the spotlight on them."

Freshman Paolo Banchero led the Blue Devils with 20 points and his classmate, Keels, had 19. Another freshman, A.J. Griffin, never really got untracked, finishing with only six points.

Chances are Griffin and Banchero will be following Krzyzewski out the door. They are the latest in his revolving door of "One and Done" players, though neither they nor Zion Williamson in 2019 could lead Duke back to the promised land.

North Carolina is back on the verge again, playing in its third final since 2016 and looking for its second title since 2017. Win or lose, though, 2022 will always be remembered as the year North Carolina sent Coach K packing for good.

One team's joy is another team's pain.

"When you're in the arena, either you're going to come out feeling great or feel agony, but you always will feel great about being in the arena," Krzyzewski said. "I was in the arena for a long time, and these kids made my last time in the arena an amazing one."

FOUL TROUBLE

Carolina big man Armando Bacot finished with his seventh straight double-double — 11 points and 21 boards — despite fouling out down the stretch. Duke's Williams played the entire game in foul trouble. He finished with four buckets for eight points — all of them on dunks.

FAMILIAR FOES

Monday will mark the fourth meeting in the season's final week between Kansas and North Carolina, but the first in the national final since 1957, before the tournament had become what it is today.

Carolina won the title game in triple overtime over Wilt Chamberlain and the Jayhawks. The Tar Heels won in 1993 on the way to the title and Kansas returned the favor in 2008, then also went on to take the championship.

North Carolina to face Kansas in blue blood title game

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Basketball Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The Big (blue) Easy has one more bit of bedazzling in store.

North Carolina and Kansas, basketball blue blood running deep in their veins, are headed to the national championship game.

The Tar Heels got there by spoiling Mike Krzyzewski's fairytale ending with a gritty performance in an historic rivalry game. Kansas put coach Bill Self in position to win the second title he's waited so long for with a 3-point barrage against another national powerhouse.

The first course was delightful. The main could be extraordinary.

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"You come to Kansas for big games, but you don't come to Kansas to play in the Elite Eight," said Jayhawks guard Christian Braun, who had 10 points against Villanova. "You don't come to Kansas to play in the Final Four. You come to play for a championship."

Same at North Carolina.

The Tar Heels (29-9), third on the wins list and the all-time leader with 21 Final Four appearances, pulled out a back-and-forth 81-77 victory over Duke to end Coach K's 47-year career with a loss to his biggest rival. The Jayhawks (33-6) have more wins than any Division I team in history, up to 2,356 after beating Villanova 81-65 in the first national semifinal Saturday night.

They'll meet Monday night in the Big Easy with a chance to add to their storied legacies. North Carolina will be playing for its seventh national championship. Kansas is looking for No. 4.

"I felt like over the last two or three years, North Carolina wasn't relevant," Tar Heels coach Hubert Davis said. "North Carolina should never be irrelevant."

The Tar Heels got their first season under Davis off to a shaky start, looking as though they weren't even going to make the bracket. North Carolina found the right gear at the right time, though, rolling into the biggest game in Tobacco Road rivalry history.

North Carolina saved its best for next-to-last, taking down the Blue Devils in their first NCAA Tournament meeting in 258 all-time games. Caleb Love continued his star turn, hitting a key 3-pointer down the stretch and scoring 28 points in a game that featured 18 lead changes and 12 ties.

Kansas and North Carolina will meet in the championship game for the first time since 1957, a triple-overtime classic won by the Tar Heels 54-53 over Wilt Chamberlain and the Jayhawks.

Now, the Tar Heels get a chance to add yet another title to the one they won under Roy Williams in 2017.

"I don't know if it was belief or it was just us being delusional. I mean, at every point of the season we knew if we came together as a team that we could get to the championship," said North Carolina big man Armando Bacot, who had 11 points and 21 rebounds despite spraining his right ankle in the second half. "And that's what we did."

The Jayhawks won the 2008 title in Self's fifth season in Lawrence, but it's been a lot of deep title-less runs since: a loss in the championship game, another in the Final Four, five other trips to at least the Sweet 16.

The 2019-20 Jayhawks may have been Self's best team, but they never got a chance to prove it when the pandemic wiped out the NCAA Tournament.

This year's version does not have quite the same wow factor, but was one of the most efficient offensive teams in the country.

The Jayhawks flexed their inside-out game to near perfection in the national semifinals against Villanova.

David McCormack bulled his way to 25 points and led an inside game that outscored the Wildcats by 16 in the paint. Ochai Agbaji keyed the 3-point barrage, hitting 6 of 7 to score 21 points. Kansas went 13 for 24 from behind the arc, nearly doubling its 3-point shooting percentage during the regular season.

"Even after this game, even after last weekend, the weekend before that — everyone's attitude was, on to the next one," Agbaji said. "And not looking too far ahead at what's going on Monday."

Now they can.

It will be unforgettable for one team and, possibly, everyone else, too.

Kansas cruises to 81-65 win over Villanova in Final Four

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Basketball Writer

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Ochai Agbaji followed a celebrating stream of Kansas players off the floor at the Final Four, their shouts of "One more!" echoing all the way up the tunnel of the Superdome and right to the door of their locker room.

One more game awaits, the biggest of their careers.

The Jayhawks earned a trip back to the national championship Saturday night with a shooting performance that will go down in history. David McCormack muscled his way to 25 points, Ochai Agbaji hit six

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3-pointers and had 21, and the only No. 1 seed to reach the national semifinals rolled to an 81-65 victory over Villanova before a huge crowd that packed the home of the New Orleans Saints one year after the pandemic kept just about everyone away.

"That's everyone's attitude — even after this game, even after last weekend, the weekend before that — everyone's attitude was on to the next one," Agbaji said, "and not looking too far ahead at what's going on Monday."

Well, they can look forward to a big-time showdown now: The Jayhawks, the winningest program in Division I history, will face North Carolina, which sits at No. 3 on the list and has been to more Final Fours than anyone.

The Tar Heels sent Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski into retirement with an 81-77 victory in their semifinal Saturday night.

The Jayhawks (33-6) hope a familiar pattern holds, too: The last three times Kansas and Villanova have met in the tourney, the winner has gone on to cut down the nets, including their lopsided Final Four matchup four years ago in San Antonio.

"You come to Kansas for big games," said Christian Braun, who had 10 points against the Wildcats, "but you don't come to Kansas to play in the Elite Eight. You don't come to Kansas to play in the Final Four. You come to play for a championship."

Playing without injured guard Justin Moore, the Wildcats (30-8) watched as Kansas scored the game's first 10 points and eventually built a 19-point cushion Saturday night. And despite big performances from Collin Gillespie, Brandon Slater and Jermaine Samuels, the short-handed and undersized Wildcats never made it all the way back.

Gillespie, playing in his 156th and final game for the Wildcats, hit five 3-pointers and finished with 17 points, while Slater hit four 3s and had 16 points. Samuels finished with 13 points in the final game of his career.

"They played great. They were well-prepared. They really executed," Villanova coach Jay Wright said. "We did a lot of things wrong, but we want to make sure they get the credit they deserve. They played a great game."

Each team finished with 13 made 3-pointers, and the 26 total shots from beyond the arc set a record for a Final Four game, topping the 25 that the same two teams made in 2018 at the Alamodome.

Unlike that night, though, it was the Jayhawks who pounced on Villanova at the start, trying to run ragged a team whose depth problems were only compounded by the loss of Moore, who tore his Achilles tendon in the regional finals.

The Jayhawks applied pressure the moment Villanova inbounded the ball. They unleashed traps in half-court, something they rarely did in the regular season. And they twice picked the pocket of Gillespie, a two-time Big East player of the year, leading to easy baskets and a 10-0 lead before some of the 70,000-plus fans had even found their seats.

"We got off to such a great start in large part because of how we shot the ball," Kansas coach Bill Self said.

Whenever Agbaji, the Big 12 player of the year, wasn't enjoying the soft rims of the Superdome to knock down 3s, the 6-foot-10, 250-pound McCormack was having his way with the undersized Wildcats in the paint.

The Jayhawks' lead soon stretched to 15 midway through the first half before Wright finally called timeout.

His counterpart could probably relate: In a game that Self has been loath to re-watch, the Wildcats raced to a 22-4 lead out of the gates four years ago and cruised to a Final Four blowout and eventually their third national championship.

"This is legit revenge for 2018," tweeted the Mavericks' Jalen Brunson, who had a big role for Villanova that night.

Daniels and Gillespie did everything they could to rewrite the finish.

Daniels, the New Orleans native who began his career down the road at Tulane, kept making hustle plays around the hoop, and Gillespie, the blue-collar kid from Philadelphia, was able to knock down a couple of contested 3s.

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The Jayhawks still led 50-34 early in the second half when Wright went to a smaller lineup and ramped up the pressure on defense. The result was three consecutive turnovers, and quick 3-pointers by Slater and Antoine — the seldom-used guard who absorbed many of Moore's minutes — that allowed Villanova to trim the lead to single digits.

"We felt like we were right there," Gillespie said. "It's a long game, it's a 40-minute game, and we pride ourselves on playing 40 minutes every night. And we were just talking about dig, scrap and claw and try to steal it in the end."

McCormack finally made Villanova pay for going small with a rim-rattling dunk with 10:25 to play.

And when the Wildcats made one last run, getting a three-point play from Samuels to close within 64-58 with just over 6 minutes left, McCormack and Braun answered again. The latter's deep fadeaway 3 as the shot-clock expired gave Kansas some breathing room again, and the Big 12 champs coasted from there into Monday night's title game.

"You knew Villanova would make a run and we just kind of held on and responded," Self said, "but I thought we played great. I thought we were disciplined defensively. I thought we stayed down on shot fakes, basically, for 40 minutes. And with the exception of defending the arc, I thought that we just played terrific."

WELCOME BACK

The Jayhawks will play for the championship on the same Superdome floor where they lost to Kentucky in the 2012 title game. Kansas allowed the Wildcats to build a big early lead that night before its comeback bid fell short.

FAMILIAR FOES

Kansas and North Carolina will play for the seventh time in the NCAA Tournament, and five of those games have occurred on the final weekend. That includes the triple-overtime 1957 title game won by the Tar Heels in Kansas City, Missouri.

STATS AND STREAKS

Kansas committed just seven turnovers while Villanova had nine. ... Self coached his 75th tournament game, breaking a tie with Michigan State's Tom Izzo for fifth on the career list. ... Villanova dropped to 5-6 when its opponent scores at least 70 points this season. ... Gillespie and Slater were 9 of 15 from beyond the arc; the rest of the Wildcats were 4 of 16.

Ukrainian forces retake areas near Kyiv amid fear of traps

By NEBI QENA and YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian troops moved cautiously to retake territory north of the country's capital on Saturday, using cables to pull the bodies of civilians off streets of one town out of fear that Russian forces may have left them booby-trapped.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that departing Russian troops were creating a "catastrophic" situation for civilians by leaving mines around homes, abandoned equipment and "even the bodies of those killed." His claims could not be independently verified.

Associated Press journalists in Bucha, a suburb northwest of Kyiv, watched as Ukrainian soldiers backed by a column of tanks and other armored vehicles used cables to drag bodies off of a street from a distance. Locals said the dead — the AP counted at least six — were civilians killed without provocation by departing Russian soldiers.

"Those people were just walking and they shot them without any reason. Bang," said a Bucha resident who declined to give his name citing safety reasons. "In the next neighborhood, Stekolka, it was even worse. They would shoot without asking any question."

Ukraine and its Western allies reported mounting evidence of Russia withdrawing its forces from around Kyiv and building its troop strength in eastern Ukraine.

The visible shift did not mean the country faced a reprieve from more than five weeks of war or that the more than 4 million refugees who have fled Ukraine will return soon. Zelenskyy said he expects departed

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towns to endure missile and rocket strikes from afar and for the battle in the east to be intense.

In his nightly video address Saturday, the Ukrainian leader said the country's troops were not allowing the Russians to retreat without a fight: "They are shelling them. They are destroying everyone they can."

Russia, Zelenskyy said, has ample forces to put more pressure on Ukraine's east and south.

"What is the goal of the Russian troops? They want to seize the Donbas and the south of Ukraine," he said. "What is our goal? To defend ourselves, our freedom, our land and our people."

Moscow's focus on eastern Ukraine also kept the besieged southeastern city of Mariupol in the cross-hairs. The port city on the Sea of Azov is located in the mostly Russian-speaking Donbas region, where Moscow-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian troops for eight years. Military analysts think Russian President Vladimir Putin is determined to capture the region after his forces failed to secure Kyiv and other major cities.

The International Committee of the Red Cross had hoped to evacuate Mariupol residents Saturday but had not yet reached the city. A day earlier, local authorities said the Red Cross was blocked by Russian forces.

An adviser to Zelenskyy, Oleksiy Arestovych, said in an interview with Russian lawyer and activist Mark Feygin that Russia and Ukraine had reached an agreement to allow 45 buses to drive to Mariupol to evacuate residents "in coming days."

The Mariupol city council said earlier Saturday that 10 empty buses were headed to Berdyansk, a city 84 kilometers (52.2 miles) west of Mariupol, to pick up people who managed to get there on their own. About 2,000 made it out of Mariupol on Friday, some on buses and some in their own vehicles, city officials said.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's deputy prime minister, Iryna Vereshchuk, said 765 Mariupol residents on Saturday used private vehicles to reach Zaporizhzhia, a city still under Ukrainian control that has served as the destination for other planned evacuations.

Among those escaping was Tamila Mazurenko, who said she fled Mariupol on Monday, made it to Berdyansk that night and then took a bus to Zaporizhzhia. Mazurenko said she waited for a bus until Friday, spending one night sleeping in a field.

"I have only one question: Why?" she said of her city's ordeal. "We only lived as normal people. And our normal life was destroyed. And we lost everything. I don't have any job, I can't find my son."

Mariupol has been surrounded by Russian forces for more than a month and suffered some of the war's worst attacks, including on a maternity hospital and a theater that was sheltering civilians. Around 100,000 people are believed to remain in the city, down from a prewar population of 430,000, and they face dire shortages of water, food, fuel and medicine.

Zelenskyy said a significant number of Russian troops were tied up in Mariupol, giving Ukraine "invaluable time ... that is allowing us to foil the enemy's tactics and weaken its capabilities."

The city's capture would give Moscow an unbroken land bridge from Russia to Crimea, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014. But its resistance also has taken on symbolic significance during Russia's invasion, said Volodymyr Fesenko, head of the Ukrainian think tank Penta.

"Mariupol has become a symbol of Ukrainian resistance, and without its conquest, Putin cannot sit down at the negotiating table," Fesenko said.

About 500 refugees from eastern Ukraine, including 99 children and 12 people with disabilities, arrived in the Russian city of Kazan by train overnight. Asked if he saw a chance to return home, Mariupol resident Artur Kirillov answered, "That's unlikely, there is no city anymore."

In towns and cities surrounding Kyiv, signs of fierce fighting were everywhere in the wake of the Russian redeployment. Destroyed armored vehicles from both armies lay in streets and fields along with scattered military gear.

Ukrainian troops were stationed at the entrance to Antonov Airport in suburb of Hostomel, demonstrating control of the runway that Russia tried to storm in the first days of the war.

Inside the compound, the Mriya, one of the biggest planes ever built, lay wrecked underneath a hangar pockmarked with holes from the February attack.

"The Russians couldn't make one like it so they destroyed it," said Oleksandr Merkushev, mayor of the

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Kyiv suburb of Irpin.

Irpin has seen some of the fiercest battles, and Merkushev said Russian troops "left behind them many bodies, many destroyed buildings, and they mined many places."

A prominent Ukrainian photojournalist who went missing last month in a combat zone near the capital was found dead Friday in the Huta Mezhyhirska village north of Kyiv, the country's prosecutor general's office announced. The prosecutor general's office attributed Maks Levin's death to two gunshots allegedly fired by the Russian military and said an investigation was underway.

Elsewhere, at least three Russian ballistic missiles were fired late Friday at the Odesa region on the Black Sea, regional leader Maksim Marchenko said. The Ukrainian military said the Iskander missiles did not hit the critical infrastructure they targeted in Odesa, Ukraine's largest port and the headquarters of its navy.

Ukraine's state nuclear agency reported a series of blasts Saturday that injured four people in Enerhodar, a southeastern city that has been under Russian control since early March along with the nearby Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Ukraine's human rights ombudsman said via Telegram that the four were badly burned when Russian troops fired light and noise grenades and mortars at a pro-Ukraine demonstration.

The head of Ukraine's delegation in talks with Russia said Moscow's negotiators informally agreed to most of a draft proposal discussed during face-to-face talks in Istanbul this week, but no written confirmation has been provided. However, Davyd Arakhamia said on Ukrainian TV that he hopes that draft is developed enough so that the two countries' presidents can meet to discuss it.

National park battlefield irises may mark razed Black homes

By JANET McCONNAUGHEY Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Nearly 60 years ago, a historic Black community founded as a home for newly freed slaves was demolished to expand a national park commemorating the Battle of New Orleans and Civil War casualties. Now park rangers and iris enthusiasts believe they may have found a botanical reminder — Louisiana irises and African lilies that the village's residents may have planted.

Woody Keim, a great-great-grandson of the community's founder, says he thinks it's a tragedy that Fazendeville was torn down and wonderful that the dark purple irises and white and pink crinum lilies have been discovered.

"Even though the government tried to erase this village, there's still life raising its little flowery head to show there once was a community here," he said.

The flowers were first noticed last spring, nearly 60 years after the tiny community was expropriated to join the national park's two sections. One part was the land where the Battle of New Orleans was fought; the other was a national cemetery where about 7,300 Union soldiers and sailors rest with later U.S. military members.

"We may never know for certain" that the flowers were planted by residents, but it seems very likely, said Gary Salathe, who created a group to rescue native irises and who first noticed those on the battlefield.

The community, called "The Village" by people who lived there, was founded around 1870 by Jean-Pierre Fazende, a grocer from a family prominent in the social class known as free people of color, said Bill Hyland, the official historian for St. Bernard Parish, where the national park is located southeast of New Orleans along the Mississippi River.

Fazende wanted to give recently freed slaves a place to live. So he subdivided an inherited strip of land that was wide enough only for a single row of houses into 33 lots for a "freedmen's colony." The land eventually included 30 homes, a church, bars, a grocery store and a school that was used at night as a dance hall.

"Like so many people of his class, he understood that the transition of the enslaved to freedom would be a long and arduous process," Hyland said.

For decades families lived and worked in the small community built where American forces had defeated the powerful British military on Jan. 8, 1815.

In the early 1960s, with an eye toward unifying the national park in time for the battle's 150th anniversary in 1965, the park service tried to buy the land. Owners refused. Eventually, Congress approved expropria-

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tion and the community was demolished.

"I think it's a tragedy that a community that had been there for close to 100 years was not considered as important as an event that took place over five days in 1815," said Keim, who was about 5 years old when Fazendeville was erased and grew up in a white neighborhood, not knowing he was related to free people of color.

Homeowners were paid about \$6,000 at a time when new homes in the area cost \$16,000, according to a 2014 article in the "64 Parishes" magazine published by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. In later years, the park service addressed the expropriation in an article on its website.

"The choice to preserve one history sacrificed another," the park service said. "While we may be able to better visualize the experience of soldiers during the War of 1812 as a result of this choice, it leaves us less able to appreciate the struggles and triumphs of later generations, and less aware of the complex layers that make up our shared history."

In 2010, a marker commemorating Fazendeville was erected near the battlefield road.

In February of last year, Salathe and other members of his Louisiana Iris Conservation Initiative were planting a small group of blue iris in another part of the park. Salathe, whose group seeks to save Louisiana irises from areas slated for development and plant them in visible spots in nature preserves and parks, noticed long, tall leaves growing in the grass a distance from the road. They looked like irises. A closer look confirmed it. He and park rangers went back a month later when the flowers bloomed and got two surprises.

First, the irises were dark purple, not the better known light blue iris that is the state flower. Then came a more startling discovery — crinum lilies. Volunteer Paul Christiansen recognized them as a species from Africa, possibly brought by enslaved people, that could not have been growing wild there.

"They would have had to be planted by people," he said.

The group then found the slight depression where Fazendeville's road once ran. The stands of iris all were on the side where houses once had stood, ending about where the back yards would have ended, Salathe said.

Salathe said he asked permission to move some of the irises and lilies to an area where they can be more easily seen. The park is considering such a display, said park ranger Kim Acker.

Keim learned of his mixed-race heritage when he began researching his ancestry online about a decade ago.

"I am proud to be part of the gumbo of Louisiana culture that my family has been part of for the last 300 years," he said.

Ramadan kicks off in much of Middle East amid soaring prices

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The Muslim holy month of Ramadan — when the faithful fast from dawn to dusk — began at sunrise Saturday in much of the Middle East, where Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sent energy and food prices soaring.

The conflict cast a pall over Ramadan, when large gatherings over meals and family celebrations are a tradition. Many in the Southeast Asian nation of Indonesia planned to start observing Sunday, and some Shiites in Lebanon, Iran and Iraq were also marking the start of Ramadan a day later.

Muslims follow a lunar calendar and a moon-sighting methodology can lead to different countries declaring the start of Ramadan a day or two apart.

Muslim-majority nations including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates had declared the month would begin Saturday morning.

A Saudi statement Friday was broadcast on the kingdom's state-run Saudi TV and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi and de facto leader of the United Arab Emirates, congratulated Muslims on Ramadan's arrival.

Jordan, a predominantly Sunni country, also said the first day of Ramadan would be on Sunday, in a break from following Saudi Arabia. The kingdom said the Islamic religious authority was unable to spot

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the crescent moon indicating the beginning of the month.

Indonesia's second-largest Islamic group, Muhammadiyah, which counts more than 60 million members, said that according to its astronomical calculations Ramadan begins Saturday. But the country's religious affairs minister had announced Friday that Ramadan would start on Sunday, after Islamic astronomers in the country failed to sight the new moon.

It wasn't the first time the Muhammadiyah has offered a differing opinion on the matter, but most Indonesians — Muslims comprise nearly 90% of the country's 270 million people — are expected to follow the government's official date.

Many had hoped for a more cheerful Ramadan after the coronavirus pandemic blocked the world's 2 billion Muslims from many rituals the past two years.

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, however, millions of people in the Middle East are now wondering where their next meals will come from. The skyrocketing prices are affecting people whose lives were already upended by conflict, displacement and poverty from Lebanon, Iraq and Syria to Sudan and Yemen.

Ukraine and Russia account for a third of global wheat and barley exports, which Middle East countries rely on to feed millions of people who subsist on subsidized bread and bargain noodles. They are also top exporters of other grains and sunflower seed oil used for cooking.

Egypt, the world's largest wheat importer, has received most of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine in recent years. Its currency has now also taken a dive, adding to other pressures driving up prices.

Shoppers in the capital Cairo turned out earlier this week to stock up on groceries and festive decorations, but many had to buy less than last year because of the soaring prices.

Ramadan tradition calls for colorful lanterns and lights strung throughout Cairo's narrow alleys and around mosques. Some people with the means to do so set up tables on the streets to dish up free post-fast Iftar meals for the poor. The practice is known in the Islamic world as "Tables of the Compassionate."

"This could help in this situation," said Rabei Hassan, the muezzin of a mosque in Giza as he bought vegetables and other food from a nearby market. "People are tired of the prices."

Worshippers attended mosque for hours of evening prayers, or "tarawih." On Friday evening, thousands of people packed the al-Azhar mosque after attendance was banned for the past two years to stem the pandemic.

"They were difficult (times) ... Ramadan without tarawih at the mosque is not Ramadan," said Saeed Abdel-Rahman, a 64-year-old retired teacher as he entered al-Azhar for prayers.

Soaring prices also exacerbated the woes of Lebanese already facing a major economic crisis. Over the past two years, the currency collapsed and the country's middle class was plunged into poverty. The meltdown has also brought on severe shortages in electricity, fuel and medicine.

In the Gaza Strip, few people were shopping Friday in markets usually packed at this time of year. Merchants said Russia's war on Ukraine has sent prices skyrocketing, alongside the usual challenges, putting a damper on the festive atmosphere that Ramadan usually creates.

The living conditions of the 2.3 million Palestinians in the impoverished coastal territory are tough, compounded by a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade since 2007.

Toward the end of Ramadan last year, a deadly 11-day war between Gaza's Hamas rulers and Israel cast a cloud over festivities, including the Eid al-Fitr holiday that follows the holy month. It was the fourth bruising war with Israel in just over a decade.

In Iraq, the start of Ramadan highlighted widespread frustration over a meteoric rise in food prices, exacerbated in the past month by the war in Ukraine.

Suhaila Assam, a 62-year-old retired teacher and women's rights activist, said she and her retired husband are struggling to survive on their combined pension of \$1,000 a month, with prices of cooking oil, flour and other essentials having more than doubled.

"We, as Iraqis, use cooking oil and flour a lot. Almost in every meal. So how can a family of five members survive?" she asked.

Akeel Sabah, 38, is a flour distributor in the Jamila wholesale market, which supplies all of Baghdad's

Rasafa district on the eastern side of the Tigris River with food. He said flour and almost all other food-stuffs are imported, which means distributors have to pay for them in dollars. A ton of flour used to cost \$390. "Today I bought the ton for \$625," he said.

"The currency devaluation a year ago already led to an increase in prices, but with the ongoing (Ukraine) crisis, prices are skyrocketing. Distributors lost millions," he said.

In Istanbul, Muslims held the first Ramadan prayers in 88 years in the Hagia Sophia, nearly two years after the iconic former cathedral was converted into a mosque.

Worshippers filled the 6th-century building and the square outside Friday night for tarawih prayers led by Ali Erbas, the government head of religious affairs. Although converted for Islamic use and renamed the Grand Hagia Sophia Mosque in July 2020, COVID-19 restrictions had limited worship at the site.

"After 88 years of separation, the Hagia Sophia Mosque has regained the tarawih prayer," Erbas said, according to the state-run Anadolu Agency.

Argentines mourn Falklands fallen on war's anniversary

By PATRICIA LUNA Associated Press

President Alberto Fernández reiterated Argentina's claim to the Falklands Islands while commemorating the troops who fell in a failed attempt to reclaim them in a war with Great Britain that started 40 years ago Saturday.

"The Malvinas were, are and will be Argentine," the president said, using the Spanish term for the South Atlantic archipelago, during a Saturday ceremony in which he awarded medals to 15 combat veterans.

He urged Britain "to abandon its unjustified and disproportionate military presence on these islands, which does nothing more than bring tension to a region characterized by being a zone of peace and international cooperation."

Britain and Argentina had been in longstanding negotiations over the status of the islands when the South American nation's military dictatorship launched an invasion on April 2, 1982, hoping to bolster its position at home.

Instead, Britain rallied in defense and recaptured the distant islands, prompting the discredited military regime to finally relinquish power a year later.

The conflict took the lives of 649 Argentines — many of them raw or ill-equipped soldiers — and 255 British soldiers.

The government has declared 2022 a year of "homage to the fallen" and has continued efforts, working with the islands' government and the Red Cross, to identify the remains of those who died and were buried there.

Argentina claims Britain has illegally occupied the islands since 1833. Britain disputes that and says Argentina is ignoring the wishes of the 3,000 residents who wish to remain British. It contends that the Falklands are now a self-governing overseas territory rather than a colony.

No other active Latin American heads of state attended Saturday's ceremony at the Malinas Museum in Buenos Aires, though former left-leaning Presidents Evo Morales of Bolivia, Fernando Lugo of Paraguay and Pepe Mujica of Uruguay were on hand.

It was one of many commemorations and demonstrations around the country, including a protest march through the center of the capital to the British Embassy and a vigil with a field of candlelit crosses in the city of Pilar late Friday night.

While the two nations have made continued efforts in recent years to improve relations, there is still resentment at British control of the islands and anger at the military leaders who started the fight.

Youths of "16, 17, 18 went to fight in the Malvinas in context totally without resources, without anything, against the English, a world power," said neighborhood activist Agustina Scaronne, who took part in the protest march. "It seems to me they are part of our history and our identity."

Opposition vows end to Orban's autocratic rule in Hungary

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By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — A diverse coalition of opposition parties made their final appeal to Hungarian voters on Saturday ahead of the country's fiercely fought election that will decide whether nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban continues his autocratic rule for a fourth consecutive term.

Several hundred supporters of the six-party coalition, United For Hungary, gathered in the rain in central Budapest one day before the vote on Sunday. The movement's leader, Peter Marki-Zay, said this national election was about bringing an end to "the most corrupt government in our 1,000-year history," and ushering in a new era of inclusive democracy in the Central European and European Union nation.

"We welcome everyone, right or left, Christian, Jewish or atheist, of any origin or sexual orientation. Because we believe that what's important is not what divides us, but what unites us," Marki-Zay said.

A small-town mayor and self-proclaimed conservative Christian, Marki-Zay, 49, became the figurehead of the six-party coalition after he was selected by an opposition primary in October to challenge Orban for the post of prime minister.

The six parties, which include the liberal Democratic Coalition, the centrist Momentum and the right-wing Jobbik, as well as smaller green parties and Socialists, are for the first time running against Orban's right-wing Fidesz party as a united bloc.

That hard-fought strategy of total unity, they say, is the only way to overcome structural impediments to defeating Orban, including what they call a media environment dominated by Fidesz allies and unfairly gerrymandered electoral districts that give Orban's party significantly more parliamentary seats than its portion of the popular vote.

Recent polls suggest the race will be the closest in more than a decade, but give Fidesz a small lead. Some analysts suggest that due to Hungary's electoral map, the opposition bloc will need to defeat Fidesz by 3 to 4 points nationally to gain a majority in parliament.

United For Hungary has campaigned on restoring Hungary's alliances with partners in the EU and NATO, which they say have suffered under the last 12 years of Orban's leadership.

At the Saturday rally, 18 opposition candidates running in Budapest districts enumerated elements of their program, including ending what they call widespread corruption under Orban. They also want Hungary to secure billions in EU financial support that has been withheld from Orban's government over concerns about democratic backsliding and violations of the rule of law.

Marki-Zay also spoke at length about Russia's invasion of neighboring Ukraine, a war that has transformed the election campaigns of both Fidesz and the opposition.

Orban, a longtime ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, has refused to supply Ukraine with weapons or allow their transfer across the Hungarian-Ukrainian border. Orban has also insisted on maintaining economic ties with Moscow, including importing Russian fossil fuels.

That ambiguous approach to the war in Ukraine, Marki-Zay said, has made Sunday's election about whether Hungary would belong to the democratic West or among the autocracies of the East.

"This struggle is now bigger than us. The war in Ukraine gave this struggle special meaning," Marki-Zay said, adding that "Viktor Orban has been left alone" among European leaders.

Ahead of the rally, Ukrainian mothers and their children who fled Ukraine as refugees marched in central Budapest to protest Russia's war on their home country. Some held up signs asking Orban to "stop supporting murderers."

One protester, Margaretha, left Ukraine's capital of Kyiv for Budapest two weeks after the start of the war. The 25-year-old graphic designer said since she was unable to stay in Ukraine "I have to at least contribute from the outside."

"I feel it is also very important to grab the attention of Hungarians to historical connections that they also had to Russia, so they can rethink their attitude," she said, pointing out that Hungary was under Soviet domination for more than 40 years.

Closing the rally, Marki-Zay said his coalition was "standing at the gate of victory," and called on Hungarian youths to convince their parents and grandparents to vote for change.

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"Tomorrow, together, we can win back our national pride. Let us be proud once again to say that we are Hungarians," he said.

US sends home Algerian held nearly 20 years at Guantanamo

WASHINGTON (AP) — An Algerian man imprisoned at the Guantanamo Bay detention center for nearly 20 years has been released and sent back to his homeland.

The Department of Defense announced Saturday that Sufyian Barhoumi was repatriated with assurances from the Algerian government that he would be treated humanely there and that security measures would be imposed to reduce the risk that he could pose a threat in the future.

The Pentagon did not provide details about those security measures, which could include restrictions on travel.

Barhoumi was captured in Pakistan and taken to the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in 2002. The United States eventually determined he was involved with various extremist groups but was not a member of al-Qaida or the Taliban, according to a report by a review board at the prison that approved him for release in 2016.

U.S. authorities attempted to prosecute Barhoumi in 2008 but the effort was dropped amid legal challenges to the initial version of the military commission system set up under President George W. Bush.

In the final days of Barack Obama's presidency in January 2017, a federal judge in Washington declined to intervene in the Pentagon's decision not to repatriate Barhoumi, whose lawyer said he had expected his client to be released and that the prisoner's family had begun making preparations for his return, including by buying him a car and a small restaurant for him to run.

The Justice Department said then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter rejected the release of Barhoumi on Jan. 12, 2017, "based on a variety of substantive concerns, shared by multiple agencies," without going into detail.

Barhoumi, who lost four fingers in a land mine explosion in Afghanistan, offered to plead guilty to any charges in 2012 in hopes he could receive a fixed sentence and return to his elderly mother, according to his attorney, Shayana Kadidal of the Center for Constitutional Rights.

"Our government owes Sufyian and his mother years of their lives back," Kadidal said. "I'm overjoyed that he will be home with his family, but I will dearly miss his constant good humor and empathy for the suffering of others in the utterly depressing environment of Guantánamo."

The effort to resettle prisoners languished under President Donald Trump. The Biden administration is attempting again to reduce the number of men held at Guantanamo as part of a broader effort to close the facility.

Barhoumi's release brings the total held at the U.S. base in Cuba to 37 men, including 18 who have been deemed eligible for repatriation or resettlement in a third country.

Tribes seek more inclusion, action from US officials

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN and FELICIA FONSECA Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — It was a quick trip for U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland with stops to hike through desert scrub near the U.S.-Mexico border and to marvel at the jagged Organ Mountains before soaking in what life was like in one of the oldest settlements along a historic trade route.

For Haaland, the time spent in West Texas and New Mexico over recent days helped to highlight the work being done to conserve parts of the borderlands.

But it also marked an opportunity for Haaland — as head of the agency that has broad oversight of tribal affairs — to deliver on promises to meet with Native American tribes that have grown increasingly frustrated about the federal government's failure to include them when making decisions about land management, energy development or the protection of sacred sites.

Haaland's selection as the first Native American to serve in the position opened a door for tribes who pointed to a history fraught with broken promises.

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"I want the era where tribes have been on the back burner to be over, and I want to make sure that they have real opportunities to have a seat at the table," Haaland said on March 17, 2021, her first day on the job.

Haaland has since met with nearly 130 of the nation's 574 federally recognized tribes as she seeks to overhaul a federal system that has limited Native American relations to a check-the-box exercise.

And while some tribes say her aspirations are admirable, others remain skeptical they will see real change and say they have yet to experience meaningful dialogue with the federal government or key decision makers.

Haaland's department has developed a plan for improving formal consultations with tribes and established an advisory committee that will aid with communication once it's up and running. In an effort to make consultation a hallmark of her tenure, Haaland has said she wants integration of tribal input to become second nature for her employees.

There has been some success as tribes felt heard when the Biden administration restored the original boundaries of Bears Ears National Monument in Utah and when the U.S. Department of Agriculture pulled back an environmental impact statement that paved the way for an Arizona copper mining operation to consult further with tribes.

But frustrations persist among tribal leaders who say their conversations with the federal government have not resulted in action on the ground.

For the Ute Indian Tribe in Utah, those frustrations lie in management of the Colorado River basin as western states grapple with less water amid a megadrought and climate change. Tribes were not included in a century-old compact that divvied up the water, and the Ute tribe says it's seeing the same exclusion now.

The tribe's Business Committee has spent hours in meetings and preparing formal comments and says it's tired of having to reiterate its position that the federal government must protect the tribe's water rights or support development of water infrastructure to serve the reservation.

Committee Chairman Shaun Chapoose said he's seen proposals, but "actual where-the-rubber-meets-the-road stuff hasn't occurred yet, and the drought gets worse."

There are similar sentiments among Navajo Nation lawmakers who are concerned about Haaland's plans to make oil and gas development off-limits on federal land surrounding Chaco Culture National Historical Park in northwestern New Mexico.

Advocacy groups sent a letter to Haaland on Thursday, saying more needs to be done to include tribes as her department charts a path forward for protecting culturally significant areas in northwestern New Mexico.

The Interior Department said more meetings with the Navajo Nation and other tribes are planned in April and that Navajo-language translators will be present.

In Nevada, several tribes and the National Congress of American Indians have asked the Interior Department and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to uphold a duty to engage in "robust and adequate" tribal consultation regarding plans for a massive lithium mine at Thacker Pass. So far, the tribes say that hasn't happened.

Under the U.S. Constitution, treaties and statutes, the federal government must consult meaningfully and in good faith with Native American and Alaska Native tribes when making decisions or taking action that is expected to impact them.

However, a 2019 report from a government watchdog found some federal agencies lacked respect for tribal sovereignty, didn't have enough resources for consultation or couldn't always reach tribes.

Another top complaint from tribes is that they are brought in when a course of action already has been set, instead of including them in the earliest phases of planning.

"The federal government says all the right words, but their mentality is one in which they are not really doing this in a way that reflects the proper government-to-government relationship that I think tribes are orienting to when they enter into these conversations," said Justin Richland, a professor at the University

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of California-Irvine School of Social Sciences who specializes in Native American law and politics.

Consultation doesn't always lead to action or create any substantive rights on the part of the tribes, making it somewhat of a "toothless tiger," said Dylan Hedden-Nicely, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation who directs the Native American Law Program at the University of Idaho.

He said it's reasonable, although incorrect, to think things would move quickly with Haaland — a member of Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico — because she had a base of knowledge about Indian Country when she took the office. But the groundwork is still being laid to effectuate real change, Hedden-Nicely said.

"It's not immediate, but it's going to be worth the wait, I'm hoping," he said.

During Haaland's confirmation hearings, Interior staff consulted with tribes on how to improve the process.

"Secretary Haaland and the entire department take our commitment to strengthening tribal sovereignty and self-governance seriously, and we have affirmed that robust consultations are the cornerstones of federal Indian policy," department spokesman Tyler Cherry said in a statement to The Associated Press.

President Joe Biden issued a memo during his first month in office, reaffirming previous executive orders on tribal consultation and directing federal agencies to spell out how they'll comply. That set in motion Haaland's efforts to give tribal leaders a direct line of communication to the Interior Department.

A congressional committee is scheduled next week to consider a bill by Democratic U.S. Rep. Raúl Grijalva of Arizona that would codify a framework for tribal consultation that supporters say would insulate the process from changes in administration.

The legislation faces an uphill battle, and some tribes want to ensure that it includes a pathway not only for the federal government to initiate consultation, but for tribal leaders to start conversations, too. Similar legislation introduced in the past has failed.

For Amber Torres, chair of the Walker River Paiute Tribe in Nevada, consultation should be more than a generic letter or email.

"I want true, meaningful, face-to-face dialogue with a timeline, intent and follow-up and next steps agreed by both parties," she said. "Making the tribal consultation process a law is long overdue, and it would be a step in the right direction to ensure tribal nation sovereignty is protected."

Lawyers hope new evidence can stop Texas woman's execution

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — During hours of relentless questioning, Melissa Lucio more than 100 times had denied fatally beating her 2-year-old daughter.

But worn down from a lifetime of abuse and the grief of losing her daughter Mariah, her lawyers say, the Texas woman finally acquiesced to investigators. "I guess I did it," Lucio responded when asked if she was responsible for some of Mariah's injuries.

Her lawyers say that statement was wrongly interpreted by prosecutors as a murder confession — tainting the rest of the investigation into Mariah's 2007 death, with evidence gathered only to prove that conclusion, and helping lead to her capital murder conviction. They contend Mariah died from injuries from a fall down the 14 steps of a steep staircase outside the family's apartment in the South Texas city of Harlingen.

As her April 27 execution date nears, Lucio's lawyers are hopeful that new evidence, along with growing public support — including from jurors who now doubt the conviction and from more than half the Texas House of Representatives — will persuade the state's Board of Pardons and Paroles and Gov. Greg Abbott to grant an execution reprieve or commute her sentence.

"Mariah's death was a tragedy not a murder. ... It would be an absolutely devastating message for this execution to go forward. It would send a message that innocence doesn't matter," said Vanessa Potkin, one of Lucio's attorneys who is with the Innocence Project.

Lucio's lawyers say jurors never heard forensic evidence that would have explained that Mariah's various injuries were actually caused by a fall days earlier. They also say Lucio wasn't allowed to present evidence questioning the validity of her confession.

The Texas Attorney General's Office maintains evidence shows Mariah suffered the "absolute worst"

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case of child abuse her emergency room doctor had seen in 30 years.

"Lucio still advances no evidence that is reliable and supportive of her acquittal," the office wrote in court documents last month.

The Cameron County District Attorney's Office, which prosecuted Lucio, declined to comment.

Lucio, 53, would be the first Latina executed by Texas and the first woman since 2014. Only 17 women have been executed in the U.S. since the Supreme Court lifted its ban on the death penalty in 1976, most recently in January 2021.

In their clemency petition, Lucio's lawyers say that while she had used drugs, leading her to temporarily lose custody of her children, she was a loving mother who worked to remain drug-free and provide for her family. Lucio has 14 children and was pregnant with the youngest two when Mariah died.

Lucio and her children struggled through poverty. At times, they were homeless and relied on food banks for meals, according to the petition. Child Protective Services was present in the family's life, but there was never an accusation of abuse by any of her children, Potkin said.

Lucio had been sexually assaulted multiple times, starting at age 6, and had been physically and emotionally abused by two husbands. Her lawyers say this lifelong trauma made her susceptible to giving a false confession.

In the 2020 documentary "The State of Texas vs. Melissa," Lucio said investigators kept pushing her to say she had hurt Mariah.

"I was not gonna admit to causing her death because I wasn't responsible," Lucio said.

Her lawyers say Lucio's sentence was disproportionate to what her husband and Mariah's father, Robert Alvarez, received. He got a four-year sentence for causing injury to a child by omission even though he also was responsible for Mariah's care, Lucio's lawyers argue.

In 2019, a three-judge panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned Lucio's conviction, ruling she was deprived of "her constitutional right to present a meaningful defense." However, the full court in 2021 said the conviction had to be upheld for procedural reasons, "despite the difficult issue of the exclusion of testimony that might have cast doubt on the credibility of Lucio's confession."

Three jurors and one alternate in Lucio's trial have signed affidavits expressing doubts about her conviction.

"She was not evil. She was just struggling. ... If we had heard passionately from the defense defending her in some way, we might have reached a different decision," juror Johnny Galvan wrote in an affidavit.

In a letter last month to the Board of Pardons and Paroles and to Abbott, 83 Texas House members said executing Lucio would be "a miscarriage of justice."

"As a conservative Republican myself, who has long been a supporter of the death penalty in the most heinous cases ... I have never seen a more troubling case than the case of Melissa Lucio," said state Rep. Jeff Leach, who signed the letter.

Abbott can grant a one-time, 30-day reprieve. He can grant clemency if a majority of the paroles board recommends it.

The board plans to vote on Lucio's clemency petition two days before the scheduled execution, Rachel Alderete, the board's director of support operations, said in an email. A spokeswoman for Abbott's office did not return an email seeking comment.

Abbott has granted clemency to only one death row inmate, Thomas Whitaker, since taking office in 2015. Whitaker was convicted of masterminding the fatal shootings of his mother and brother. His father, who survived, led the effort to save Whitaker, saying he would be victimized again if his son was executed.

Lucio's supporters have said her clemency request is similar in that her family would be retraumatized if she's executed.

"Please allow us to reconcile with Mariah's death and remember her without fresh pain, anguish and grief. Please spare the life of our mother," Lucio's children wrote in a letter to Abbott and the board.

Macron holds 1st big rally; Rivals stir up 'McKinsey Affair'

By SYLVIE CORBET and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

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PARIS (AP) — French President Emmanuel Macron held his first big rally Saturday in his race for reelection, promising the French more “progress” and “solidarity” over the next five years, but his campaign has hit a speed bump.

It’s been dubbed “the McKinsey Affair,” named after an American consulting company hired to advise the French government on its COVID-19 vaccination campaign and other policies. A new French Senate report questions the government’s use of private consultants and accuses McKinsey of tax dodging. The issue is energizing Macron’s rivals and dogging him at campaign stops ahead of France’s April 10 first-round presidential vote.

Macron, a centrist who has been in the forefront of diplomatic efforts to end the war in Ukraine, has a comfortable lead in polls so far over far-right leader Marine Le Pen and other challengers.

“We are here to make possible a project of progress, of independence, for the future, for our France,” Macron told a crowd of about 30,000 at a stadium that usually hosts rugby matches. “I see difficulties to make ends meet, situations of insecurity ... and so much more to accomplish to turn back extremism.”

Speaking to those who see “all their salary go into gasoline, bills, rent” as the war in Ukraine is driving up food and energy prices, Macron promised to let companies give a tax-free bonus to employees of up to 6,000 euros (\$6,627) as soon as this summer.

He also promised to raise the minimum pension to 1,100 euros (\$1,214) a month for those who have worked full time — up from about 700 euros now. The retirement age will need to be progressively raised from 62 to 65 to finance the plan, he said.

Supporters welcomed him, chanting “Macron, president!” “One, two, five more years!” and waving the French tricolor flag.

But for those trying to unseat Macron, the word “McKinsey” is becoming a rallying cry.

Critics describe the French government’s 1 billion euros spent on consulting firms like McKinsey last year as privatization and Americanization of French politics and are demanding more transparency.

The French Senate, where opposition conservatives hold a majority, published a report last month investigating the government’s use of private consulting firms. The report found that state spending on such contracts has doubled in the past three years despite mixed results, and warned they could pose conflicts of interest. Dozens of private companies are involved in the consulting, including giants like Ireland-based multinational Accenture and French group Capgemini.

Most damningly, the report says McKinsey hasn’t paid corporate profit taxes in France since at least 2011, but instead used a system of “tax optimization” through its Delaware-based parent company.

McKinsey issued a statement saying it “respects French tax rules that apply to it” and defending its work in France.

McKinsey notably advised the French government on its COVID-19 vaccination campaign, which got off to a halting start but eventually became among the world’s most comprehensive. Outside consultants have also advised Macron’s government on housing reform, asylum policy and other measures.

The Senate report found that such firms earn smaller revenues in France than in Britain or Germany, and noted that spending on outside consultants was higher under conservative former President Nicolas Sarkozy than under Macron.

Budget Minister Olivier Dussopt said the state money spent on consultants was about 0.3% of what the government spent on public servants’ salaries last year and that McKinsey earned only a tiny fraction of it. He accused campaign rivals of inflating the affair to boost their own ratings.

The affair is hurting Macron nonetheless.

A former investment banker once accused of being “president of the rich,” Macron saw his ratings surge when his government spent massively to protect workers and businesses early in the pandemic, vowing to do “whatever it takes” to cushion the blow. But his rivals say the McKinsey affair rekindles concerns that Macron and his government are beholden to private interests and out of touch with ordinary voters.

Everywhere Macron goes now, he’s asked about it.

“The last few days, I heard a lot speaking about tax evasion, an American company,” Macron said at

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Saturday's rally. "I want to remind those who show outrage that they used them (consulting firms)" in local government as well.

He also pointed to his government's fight to make sure corporations pay their fair share of taxes.

"The minimum tax in Europe, we fought for it, we did it," he said.

France is pushing for quick implementation in the 27-nation European Union of the minimum corporate tax of 15%, on which more than 130 countries agreed last October.

Biden says sub he commissioned will enhance US security

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — In a public ceremony delayed two years by the pandemic, President Joe Biden on Saturday commissioned the USS Delaware, a nuclear attack submarine, saying it would enhance national security, though he made no reference to the global turmoil from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"As the commander in chief, I believe it is our sacred obligation as a nation to prepare and equip those troops that we send into harm's way and to care for them and their families when they return home," he told a crowd of invited guests and dignitaries assembled on a sunny but chilly spring day on a restricted part of the dock in Wilmington.

This latest Navy ship to carry the Delaware name, the president said in brief remarks, "is part of a long tradition of serving our nation proudly and strengthening our nation's security ... not just us, but our allies and partners around the world as well. In fact it's already been doing that for some time."

In April 2020, with the coronavirus pandemic spreading across the United States, the Delaware was commissioned while underwater, a first for a Navy vessel. Since then it has been in training.

After the ceremony, the president took a private tour of the Delaware. He did not respond to questions from reporters about Ukraine.

First lady Jill Biden is the submarine's sponsor, a role meant to bring a vessel luck. During her remarks, she exclaimed: "Officers and crew of the USS Delaware, man our ship and bring her to life." The crew responded, "Aye aye, ma'am" and, as she applauded, sailors in dress uniforms ran behind the crowd, then down onto the submarine and lined up on the deck.

Saturday's commissioning comes amid the war in Ukraine and after Biden announced a budget blueprint that proposes spending \$795 billion on defense, which would mean an increase for the Pentagon.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said the proposal would at best "leave our armed forces simply treading water" because of inflation. But some progressive Democrats complained that was too much funding after the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan last summer.

With a crew of 136 sailors, the Delaware is the 18th Virginia-class fast attack submarine, which is designed to seek and destroy enemy submarines and surface ships, and can fire Tomahawk cruise missiles, the Navy says.

The ship is 377 feet long, can dive to depths greater than 800 feet and operate at speeds in excess of 25 knots submerged. The submarine is also designed to operate for more than three decades without needing to refuel, according to a Defense Department news release.

This is the first time in a century the name "Delaware" has been used for a Navy vessel, according to a Defense Department statement, and marks the seventh naval ship named after the state which Biden represented in the Senate for 36 years before his tenures as vice president and president.

Elton John credits Ryan White's family with saving his life

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Elton John credits teenage AIDS victim Ryan White and his family with saving his life.

The singer told the crowd at his concert at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis on Friday that spending time around White's family caused him to make changes in his life. White was from Indiana.

"I knew that my lifestyle was crazy and out of order. And six months later, I got sober and clean and have been ever since," John said.

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He said White's family was the catalyst for him to change.

"I cannot thank them enough, because without them, I'd probably be dead," the singer said, WTHR-TV reported.

White died in Indianapolis at age 18 on April 8, 1990. He had contracted HIV years earlier through a tainted blood transfusion. His mother, Jeanne White-Ginder continues to share a close relationship with John, who acknowledged her presence at the concert.

"I love you so much," John said. "Thank you for all you've done for me. This song is for you."

He then began playing "Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me."

Pope blasts Russia's 'infantile' war, EU-Libya deal in Malta

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VALLETTA, Malta (AP) — Pope Francis said Saturday he was considering a possible visit to the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv and blasted the leader who launched a "savage" war, delivering his most pointed denunciation yet of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In his remarks in Malta, Francis didn't cite President Vladimir Putin by name, but the reference was clear when he said "some potentate" had unleashed the threat of nuclear war on the world in an "infantile and destructive aggression."

"We had thought that invasions of other countries, savage street fighting and atomic threats were grim memories of a distant past," Francis told Maltese officials on the Mediterranean island nation at the start of a weekend visit.

Francis has to date avoided referring to Russia or Putin by name, in keeping with the Vatican's tradition of not calling out aggressors to keep open options for dialogue. But Saturday's criticism of the powerful figure responsible for the war marked a new level of outrage for the pope.

"Once again, some potentate, sadly caught up in anachronistic claims of nationalist interest, is provoking and fomenting conflicts, whereas ordinary people sense the need to build a future that will either be shared or not be at all," he said.

Francis told reporters en route to Malta that a possible visit to Kyiv was "on the table," but no dates have been set or trip confirmed. The mayor of the Ukrainian capital had invited Francis on March 8 to come as a messenger of peace along with other religious figures, but has recently warned even healthy city residents who fled that the city is still endangered by Russian hostilities.

Francis also said the war had pained his heart so much that he sometimes forgets about the pain in his knees. Francis has been suffering for months from a strained ligament in his right knee. The inflammation got so bad that the Vatican arranged for a tarmac elevator to get him on and off the plane for Saturday's flight to Malta, and his limp was more pronounced Saturday.

The Malta visit, originally scheduled for May 2020, was always supposed to focus on migration, given Malta's role at the heart of Europe's migration debate. The issue took on more import with the forced exodus of over 4 million Ukrainian refugees. Francis focused his remarks on the perilous Mediterranean migration route and Europe's flawed migration policies in welcoming people fleeing war, poverty and conflict.

Speaking with Malta's president by his side, Francis denounced the "sordid agreements" the European Union has made with Libya to turn back migrants and said Europe must show humanity in welcoming them. He called for the Mediterranean to be a "theater of solidarity, not the harbinger of a tragic shipwreck of civilization."

Francis was referring to the EU's program to train Libya's coast guard, which patrols the North African country's coast for migrant smuggling and brings the would-be refugees back to shore. The program was strongly backed by Italy and other front-line Mediterranean countries to try to stem the flow of hundreds of thousands of desperate migrants each year.

But human rights groups have condemned the EU-funded program as a violation of the migrants' rights and documented gross abuses in the Libyan detention camps. Just this week, German said its military would no longer provide training to the Libyan coast guard given its "unacceptable," and in some cases

illegal, treatment of migrants.

Francis has condemned the Libyan detention facilities as concentration camps, but he went further Saturday to shame the EU for its complicity in the abuses there.

"Civilized countries cannot approve for their own interest sordid agreements with criminals who enslave other human beings," he said.

Malta, the European Union's smallest country with a half-million people, has long been on the front lines of the flow of migrants and refugees across the Mediterranean and often has come under fire for refusing to let rescue ships dock. Just this week a German aid group sought port for 106 migrants rescued at sea and, by Saturday, the ship was heading to Sicily instead.

Malta has frequently called upon its bigger European neighbors to shoulder more of the burden receiving would-be refugees.

Francis has frequently echoed that call, and linked it on Saturday to the welcome the Maltese once gave the Apostle Paul, who according to the biblical account was shipwrecked off Malta around A.D. 60 while en route to Rome and was shown unusual kindness by the islanders.

Later Saturday, Francis travelled by catamaran ferry to the island of Gozo, making his own the Mediterranean seafaring tradition to celebrate a prayer meeting at Malta's national shrine. Flanked by two Maltese churchmen who are key aides at the Vatican, Francis sat on a white chair on deck for the hour-long trip and was welcomed by thundering canons as the ship came in Gozo's port.

Skepticism meets migrant smuggler crackdown in Guatemala

By SONIA PÉREZ D. Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — Eager to show it's trying to slow the steady flow of its people north to the United States, Guatemala recently tripled prison sentences for migrant smugglers.

The day after Guatemala's legislature approved the measure in February, 18-year-old Yashira Hernández left her home near the Mexican border for the trip north — hiring a smuggler to help.

A month later, Hernández was back, deported from the U.S., fretting over her family's debt and contemplating a second attempt — again with her smuggler.

While the legal reform is supposed to dissuade smugglers and cast the government as a willing partner of the U.S. in managing migration, experts and lawmakers say it will only make the trip more expensive. The poverty, violence and other factors pushing Guatemalans to migrate remain strong and the smuggling networks continue to ply their trade — sometimes with the help of public officials.

Possible prison sentences hold little importance if those responsible rarely make it to trial.

Guatemala's government says it is preparing for further increased migration due to a decision announced Friday by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control to end a system limiting asylum at the southwest border on May 23. That policy had been based on reducing the spread of COVID-19 during the pandemic.

Officials throughout the region expect migrant smugglers to seize on the policy change to drum up more business with misinformation about the sort of reception migrants will meet.

Guatemala's immigration agency said it was forming a multidisciplinary group to respond to changes in migration flows, including securing the country's borders.

In 2020, more than 21,000 Guatemalans were deported home from the U.S., but prosecutors only charged 12 people in connection with migrant smuggling, according to data from the Attorney General's Office, said lawmaker Andrea Villagran. Only four of the 12 were convicted.

"You have to see the lack of capacity the Attorney General's Office has to bring these criminal structures to justice," said Villagran who voted against the reform. "The law change is only a show. What this law did was increase the price of smuggling. If the problem isn't really resolved, the people are going to continue wanting to migrate."

Villagran also said there's little motivation for the government to slow migration.

"The interest is in continuing to export Guatemalans so they can continue sending remittances and continue sustaining this country's economy," she said. Last year, despite the global pandemic, Guatemalans

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sent home \$15 billion.

Hernández said she decided to leave last month to escape poverty. Her family scraped together thousands of dollars to hire a smuggler, but in a month's time she was back where she started, now with a massive debt that is virtually unpayable if she stays in Guatemala.

She was unaware that the penalties for migrant smuggling had risen to 30 years from 10, now on par with sentences for kidnapping and murder.

"Here there's no work and a lot of violence," Hernández said.

The tougher sentences were proposed by the office of President Alejandro Giammattei. His relationship with Washington has been tense, in part because the U.S. government has listed corruption as one of the root causes of immigration in Central America and has accused his administration of undermining Guatemala's justice system while inventing charges to prosecute anticorruption crusaders.

Ursula Roldán, a migration expert at the Rafael Landívar University, said that while poverty and corruption remain rampant, emigration will continue.

She notes that deportations from the U.S. have fallen even as Guatemalan emigration continues. "It's not that people aren't trying to leave Guatemala. It's that the containment is in Mexico, at the southern and northern borders," she said. "That's where the problem is building."

Guatemalans have featured prominently in recent high-profile — and deadly — smuggling cases in Mexico.

In January 2021, the incinerated bodies of 19 people, including 16 Guatemalan migrants, were found in northern Mexico near the Texas border. Prosecutors said they were shot by a Tamaulipas state police unit and then burned.

In December, 55 migrants were killed and more than 100 injured when a semitrailer carrying them crashed in southern Mexico. Again the majority were from Guatemala.

This year, Guatemalan authorities, under pressure to show they're taking smuggling seriously, arrested 10 people allegedly involved in smuggling the migrants killed last year near the Texas border.

"People keep migrating because the structural causes of migration are still there, they haven't changed," Roldán said.

Stuardo Campos, the prosecutor charged with applying the new law, sees the increased sentences as a positive development and says smuggler arrests are up, but concedes that the factors driving migration are strong and says he lacks the resources to effectively tackle the problem.

Campos noted that the new law requires prosecutors to show proof that moving, housing and helping migrants was done for an economic benefit. That's a tall order when migrants almost never agree to testify against their smugglers.

Many smugglers offer a second or third try if the first fails, and migrants have almost no hope of paying off the original debt without reaching the United States. So there's a large disincentive to helping prosecute their smuggler.

Campos laments that lack of cooperation. He has 340 open investigations into migrant smuggling involving 10 smuggling rings operating across Guatemala.

In the case of those killed in northern Mexico, Campos said the leader of the smuggling ring was a former mayor who is now a fugitive.

"There are criminal networks within the government that facilitate the entrance and exit and even (false) documents for migrants," said Villagran, the federal lawmaker.

"The whole system is so coopted that any popularly elected public official could be tied to these networks," she said. "Ultimately, they need political favors to survive and those favors translate to financing" of electoral campaigns.

In the first three months of this year, 7,552 Guatemalans were deported from the United States. Among them were Hernández and 20-year-old Emileth Tobar.

Tobar left Guatemala on Feb. 1, the same day Congress voted to increase the sentences for migrant smugglers. Her mother had died, and as the eldest child it was her responsibility to provide for her siblings.

Like Hernández, she was detained shortly after crossing the U.S. border and within a week was flown back to Guatemala. It was her third attempt.

"When they deported us the plane was full of young people; they told us the oldest was 26," she said.

"Now we have to figure out what to do."

Civilian Army leader led child porn ring, risked US security

By MICHAEL REZENDES Associated Press

SIERRA VISTA, Ariz. (AP) — David Frodsham was a top civilian commander at a U.S. air base in Afghanistan when he "jokingly" asked an IT technician for access to YouPorn, the video-sharing pornographic website.

During his time in the war zone, Frodsham told one woman that he hired her because he "wanted to be surrounded by pretty women," and routinely called others "honey," "babe," and "cougar" before he was ordered home after the military verified multiple allegations of sexual harassment.

"I would not recommend placing him back into a position of authority but rather pursuing disciplinary actions at his home station," wrote one commanding officer when recommending that the Army order Frodsham to leave his post at Bagram Airfield and return to Fort Huachuca, a major Army installation in Arizona, according to a U.S. Army investigative file obtained by The Associated Press.

But when Frodsham returned to his home station in fall 2015, he rejoined the Network Enterprise Technology Command, the Army's information technology service provider, where he had served as director of personnel for a global command of 15,000 soldiers and civilians, according to his Army resume.

By spring of the following year, he was arrested in Arizona for leading a child sex abuse ring that included an Army sergeant who was posting child pornography to the internet. Among the victims was one of Frodsham's adopted sons

Frodsham pleaded guilty to sex abuse charges in 2016 and is serving a 17-year sentence. But records reviewed by the AP show that the U.S. Army and the state of Arizona missed or ignored multiple red flags over more than a decade, which allowed Frodsham to allegedly abuse his adopted son and other children for years, all the while putting national security at risk.

The state permitted Frodsham and his wife, Barbara, to foster, adopt and retain custody of their many children despite nearly 20 complaints, and attempted complaints, of abuse, neglect, maltreatment and licensing violations. Meanwhile, the Army gave Frodsham security clearances and sensitive jobs at a time when his illicit sexual practices made him vulnerable to blackmail.

"He would have been an obvious target of foreign intelligence services because of his role and his location," said Frank Figliuzzi, the former assistant director of counterintelligence for the FBI. "Fort Huachuca is one of the more sensitive installations in the continental United States. People with security issues should not be there." In addition to NETCOM, where Frodsham worked, Fort Huachuca is home to a contingent of the Army's Intelligence and Security Command, according to its website.

Public relations officials at Fort Huachuca confirmed that Frodsham was a program manager for NETCOM before he was arrested on child sex abuse charges. They declined to say whether Frodsham was disciplined after returning from Afghanistan, or whether the Army ever considered him a security risk.

Frodsham, former Sgt. Randall Bischak and a third man not associated with the Army are all serving prison terms for the roles they played in the child sex abuse ring. But the investigation is continuing because Sierra Vista police believe additional men took part.

Now, the criminal investigation is spilling over into civil court, where two of Frodsham's adopted sons have filed separate lawsuits against the state for licensing David and Barbara Frodsham as foster parents in a home where they say they were physically and sexually abused throughout their lives.

A third adopted son filed suit Tuesday in Arizona state court in Cochise County, said attorney Lynne Cadigan, who represents all three. In the latest complaint, 19-year-old Trever Frodsham says case workers missed or overlooked numerous signs that David and Barbara Frodsham were unfit parents. These included a 2002 sex abuse complaint filed with local police by one of the Frodshams' biological daughters against an older biological brother, and the fact that David and Barbara Frodsham were themselves victims of child sex abuse.

Trever's allegations echo those featured in an earlier lawsuit filed by his older biological brother, Ryan Frodsham, and one filed by Neal Taylor, both of whom were also adopted into the Frodsham household.

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In an interview with the AP, Ryan Frodsham said his adoptive father began sexually abusing him when he was 9 or 10 years old and the abuse continued into his teens, when David Frodsham began offering his son's sexual services to other men. "Makes me throw up thinking about it," Ryan said.

In his lawsuit, Ryan Frodsham said the state was informed that David and Barbara Frodsham were physically abusing their children "by slapping them in the face, pinching them, hitting them with a wooden spoon, putting hot sauce in their mouths, pulling them by the hair, bending their fingers back to inflict pain, forcing them to hold cans with their arms extended for long periods time," and refusing to let them use the bathroom unless the door remained open. In his AP interview, Ryan said Barbara never sexually abused him but walked into the room where David was abusing him at least twice.

"She knew what was going on," he said.

The lawsuits and related legal filings also say investigators with the Department of Child Safety and case workers with Catholic Community Services, which subcontracts foster and adoption work from the state, failed to effectively follow up on 19 complaints and attempted complaints regarding the Frodsham home spanning more than a decade.

The complaints began in 2002, when the Frodshams applied for their foster care license, and continued until 2015, when David Frodsham was charged with disorderly conduct and driving drunk with children in his car, prompting the state to suspend their license indefinitely and remove all foster children from their home, although the charges were later dismissed.

Five months later, the Army deployed Frodsham to Afghanistan, where he was ordered back to Arizona after only four months of service.

REPORTS FELL ON DEAF EARS

The lawsuits say the Frodshams' adopted children attempted to report their own physical and sexual abuse without success.

For instance, Neal Taylor's lawsuit says he attempted to report that David Frodsham was sexually abusing him in two phone calls to his case manager, both of which he placed from school.

The first time, the case manager reported the call to Neal's adoptive mother, who "interrogated" him and "proceeded to punish" him, according to his lawsuit. The second time, the case manager refused to meet with him unless he disclosed the reason for his call over the phone, because he would have had to drive 90 minutes from Tucson to Sierra Vista for a private meeting.

Ryan Frodsham's lawsuit and the related legal filings say he reported repeated alleged physical abuse by Barbara Frodsham to Sierra Vista police when he was 12 years old after running away from home. Police photographed several bruises, returned him to Barbara Frodsham, and reported the incident to the state Department of Child Safety. Despite the photographs and a police report, a case worker who met with Ryan five weeks later found his allegations "unsubstantiated."

Arizona Department of Child Safety spokesman Darren DaRonco declined to answer specific questions about the lawsuits. He instead sent an email outlining the state's procedures for screening prospective foster and adoptive parents. "Despite all of these safeguards, people are sometimes able to avoid detection," DaRonco said, "especially if a person has no prior criminal or child abuse history."

Yet David and Barbara Frodsham have both said they were abused as minors.

In their written application to become foster parents, Barbara Frodsham indicated that neither she nor her husband had been sexually victimized. But in recent pretrial testimony for Ryan Frodsham's lawsuit, she said she would have revealed her abuse if she had been asked by a state investigator as part of the licensing process.

David Frodsham, for his part, told a probation official after his guilty plea that he had been abused as a teenager.

Many child welfare experts believe people with a history of child sexual abuse are more likely to abuse children in their own households and should be questioned to ensure they've overcome their trauma before being allowed to provide foster care.

Arizona's child welfare case workers "did not know how to interview and, therefore, they didn't get candid

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answers from the Frodshams," said Kathleen Faller, an expert witness retained in Ryan Frodsham's lawsuit. In pretrial testimony, Faller also said the state should not have granted the Frodshams' foster care license.

Barbara Frodsham, who divorced David following his guilty plea, did not return multiple telephone calls from the AP, and did not respond to detailed questions left on her voice mail. At the time of her husband's sentencing, she was working at Fort Huachuca as a personnel specialist, according to law enforcement records. A spokeswoman at Fort Huachuca said she still holds the position.

Attorneys for the state and the other defendants are seeking to have the cases dismissed, based in part on state law that grants immunity to state employees for mistakes or misjudgments committed in the course of their work. The law does not provide immunity for "gross negligence," which the Frodsham brothers and Neal Taylor are alleging.

The state also says all the complaints about the Frodsham children and the Frodsham home were properly handled.

CHILD SEX ABUSE RING

The Frodsham case started as child sex abuse investigations often do: with an undercover Homeland Security agent lurking in a chat room favored by child pornographers. The Philadelphia-based agent, using the Kik messaging app, ran into someone calling himself "Pup Brass" who was posting videos and photos labeled "pedopicsandvidd."

Kik offers users a degree of anonymity but it stores IP addresses, which help identify a device's connection to the internet and can help identify the device's owner. According to a Sierra Vista police probable cause statement, federal and local law enforcement agents using the IP address and other information — some gleaned from social media accounts — soon determined that "Pup Brass" was Sgt. Randall Bischak.

When they raided his home, seizing computers, cell phones, tablets and CDs holding child pornography, Bischak confessed that he'd been having sex with a 59-year-old man he called "Dave" and his teenage son. In at least one instance Bischak had secretly recorded the sex on video. He also told investigators that he and Frodsham discussed having sex with small children and that Frodsham had supplied him with at least one of the "little ones."

Thomas Ransford, who specializes in child sex abuse cases for the Sierra Vista police, was no stranger to Frodsham. In the mid-2000s, he served as a military police officer at Fort Huachuca when Frodsham was director of Training, Plans, Mobilization and Security. "So, I knew him. I was familiar with him, attended meetings with him," Ransford recalled. He also knew that Frodsham's foster kids were always in trouble.

When Ransford first questioned Frodsham he denied everything. "He was pompous, like he was the smartest guy in the room," Ransford recalled. Then Ransford played the video Bischak had secretly taken of himself having three-way sex with Frodsham and his adopted son, Ryan, and Frodsham began to acknowledge his crimes.

Ryan Frodsham also initially denied his father had abused him. "Ryan appeared very defensive of his father and did not want to implicate him in any misconduct," Ransford wrote in a probable cause statement.

But when Ransford showed him a compromising photograph seized from Bischak's cell phone, Ryan began to open up. Over the course of several months, Ransford said, Ryan identified others he said were part of his father's child sex abuse ring, fueling the continuing investigation.

"There's others we're aware of," Ransford said. "It's open."

The Frodsham child sex abuse ring is part of a cluster of sex abuse cases that have come to light in Cochise County, Arizona, over the last several years, including several involving U.S. Border Patrol agents, two of whom worked at the Naco, Arizona, Border Crossing. Among them:

— John Daly III. A year ago, authorities arrested the recently retired Border Patrol agent after DNA evidence led them to suspect him in at least eight rapes, and to consider whether he is the so-called East Valley rapist, who terrorized women outside Phoenix throughout the 1990s. Prosecutors in Maricopa and Cochise counties have charged him with multiple counts of sexual assault and kidnapping. Daly, who is being held without bail, has pleaded not guilty.

— Dana Thornhill. A year ago, Thornhill was sentenced to a 40-year prison term after pleading guilty to years of sexually abusing his two children. Thornhill was charged following a stand-off with police in

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which he holed up in a local church. At the time, Thornhill was the chaplain at the Naco Border Crossing. — Paul Adams. In 2017, Adams was charged with raping his two daughters, one of whom was just 6 weeks old; taking videos of the sexual assaults; and posting them on the Internet. Adams, who took his own life before standing trial, was also stationed at the Naco Border Crossing.

Ransford believes the cluster of cases should be attributed to good police work and effective prosecution, which give victims and others the confidence to report child sex abuse. "People report because they know something's going to be done about it," he said.

But Cadigan, the attorney representing the Frodsham brothers and Neal Taylor, wonders whether child sex abuse in southern Arizona is on the rise. "Law enforcement has been very effective, and I appreciate their efforts, but I've been taking these cases for 30 years and I've never been so busy," she said.

A SCANDAL-PLAGUED DEPARTMENT

The physical and sexual abuse allegedly endured by the Frodsham brothers and Neal Taylor occurred at a time when Arizona's child welfare system was embroiled in scandal. In 2013, officials revealed that what was then the Department of Protective Services had a backlog of more than 6,500 abuse and neglect complaints it had never investigated.

The revelation prompted then-Gov. Jan Brewer to dissolve the entire department and create a new Cabinet-level office called the Department of Child Safety. "It is evident that our child welfare system is broken, impeded by years of operational failures," said Brewer, a Republican.

Underlying the scandal were deep budget cuts to family support services, leading to soaring abuse and neglect complaints and what an auditor general's report would later refer to as "unmanageable workloads, staff turnover and the limited experience of some CPS supervisors and newly hired investigators."

In 2014, an analysis produced for the state Legislature showed that the increase in workloads in Arizona during the decade that ended in 2012 was greater than in any other state but one. It also showed that the response time for abuse and neglect complaints ballooned from 63 hours to nearly 250 hours, between 2009 and 2012.

In its defense against Ryan Frodsham's lawsuit, the state is trying to exclude any mention of the department's troubled past. "There is no evidence that the types of problems that led to the dissolution of CPS has any relation to or impact on his case," the state said in a pretrial motion.

But David and Barbara Frodsham were licensed as foster parents in 2002, at the dawn of what was perhaps the department's most troubled period, and formally adopted the three men going to court about a decade later, shortly before the system collapsed. "The jury is entitled to the full picture," lawyers for Ryan Frodsham said.

In his AP interview, Ryan Frodsham said he filed his lawsuit for one reason: "I want the state to admit what it did was wrong."

West, Russia mull nuclear steps in a 'more dangerous' world

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russia's assault on Ukraine and its veiled threats of using nuclear arms have policymakers, past and present, thinking the unthinkable: How should the West respond to a Russian battlefield explosion of a nuclear bomb?

The default U.S. policy answer, say some architects of the post-Cold War nuclear order, is with discipline and restraint. That could entail stepping up sanctions and isolation for Russian President Vladimir Putin, said Rose Gottemoeller, deputy secretary-general of NATO from 2016 to 2019.

But no one can count on calm minds to prevail in such a moment, and real life seldom goes to plan. World leaders would be angry, affronted, fearful. Miscommunication and confusion could be rife. Hackers could add to the chaos. Demands would be great for tough retaliation — the kind that can be done with nuclear-loaded missiles capable of moving faster than the speed of sound.

When military and civilian officials and experts have war-gamed Russian-U.S. nuclear tensions in the past, the tabletop exercises sometimes end with nuclear missiles arcing across continents and oceans, striking

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the capitals of Europe and North America, killing millions within hours, said Olga Oliker, program director for Europe and Central Asia at the International Crisis Group.

"And, you know, soon enough, you've just had a global thermonuclear war," Oliker said.

It's a scenario officials hope to avoid, even if Russia targets Ukraine with a nuclear bomb.

Gottemoeller, a chief U.S. nuclear negotiator with Russia for the Obama administration, said that the outlines that President Joe Biden has provided so far of his nuclear policy stick with those of past administrations in using atomic weapons only in "extreme circumstances."

"And a single Russian nuclear use demonstration strike, or -- as horrific as it would be -- a nuclear use in Ukraine, I do not think would rise to that level" of demanding a U.S. nuclear response, said Gottemoeller, now a lecturer at Stanford University.

For former Sen. Sam Nunn, a Georgia Democrat who over nearly a quarter-century in Congress helped shape global nuclear policy, the option of Western nuclear use has to remain on the table.

"That's what the doctrine of mutual assured destruction has been about for a long, long time," said Nunn, now strategic adviser to the Nuclear Threat Initiative security organization, which he co-founded.

"If President Putin were to use nuclear weapons, or any other country uses nuclear weapons first, not in response to a nuclear attack, not in response to an existential threat to their own country ... that leader should assume that they are putting the world in the high risk of a nuclear war, and nuclear exchange," Nunn said.

For U.S. officials and world leaders, discussions of how to respond to a limited nuclear attack are no longer theoretical. In the first hours and days of Russia's invasion, Putin referenced Russia's nuclear arsenal. He warned Western countries to stay out of the conflict, saying he was putting his nuclear forces on heightened alert.

Any country that interfered with Russia's invasion would face consequences "such as you have never seen, in your entire history," Putin declared.

How to respond to any use by Russia of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons was among the issues discussed by Biden and other Western leaders when they met in Europe in late March. Three NATO members — the United States, Britain and France — have nuclear weapons.

One overarching concern is that by casting some nuclear weapons as tactical weapons to be used in battle, Russia could break the nearly eight-decade global taboo against using a nuclear weapon against another country. Even comparatively small tactical nuclear weapons approach the strength of the atomic bomb the United States dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, in World War II.

Gottemoeller and Nunn praise Biden's restraint in the face of Putin's implicit nuclear warnings at the outset of the war. Biden made no known move to raise the U.S. nuclear alert status. The U.S. also postponed a routine Minuteman III test launch last month to avoid escalating tensions.

But in the short term and long, the world appears more at risk of a nuclear conflict as a result of Putin's bungled invasion and nuclear threats, according to arms control experts and negotiators.

The weaknesses that Russia's invasion exposed in its conventional military forces may leave Putin feeling even more compelled in the future to threaten nuclear use as his best weapon against the far-stronger United States and NATO.

While Gottemoeller argued that Ukraine's surrendering of its Soviet nuclear arsenal in 1994 opened the door for three decades of international integration and growth, she said some governments may take a different lesson from nuclear Russia's invasion of non-nuclear Ukraine — that they need nuclear bombs as a matter of survival.

Jeffrey Lewis, an arms control expert and professor at the Middlebury Institute, said the nuclear danger is going up.

"And we can tell which pathways would cause that risk to go up further. And certainly direct conflict with Russia from forces based in NATO countries is one pathway to a nuclear war," Lewis said.

Gottemoeller took heart in Putin grumbling publicly late last month about "cancel culture." That suggested he was vulnerable to world condemnation over his Ukraine invasion, and worse to come if he broke the post-World War II taboo on nuclear attack, she said.

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Detonating a nuclear bomb in a country Putin sought dominion over, one next to his own, wouldn't be rational, Nunn said. But he said neither was Putin's announcement of heightened nuclear alert.

As a young congressional aide during the Cuban missile crisis, Nunn witnessed U.S. officers and pilots in Europe standing by for orders to launch nuclear weapons on the Soviet Union. The danger today isn't yet as great as in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, when Soviet deployment of nuclear missiles on Cuba raised the threat of nuclear war with the U.S., he said.

But the risk of intentional nuclear escalation now is high enough to make a cease-fire in Ukraine crucial, Nunn said. The modern threat of cyberattacks adds to the risk of a mistaken launch. And it's not clear how vulnerable U.S. and, especially, Russian systems are to such hacking attempts, he said.

Putin "has been very reckless in his saber rattling with nuclear weapons," Nunn said. "And that I think has made everything more dangerous, including a blunder."

NY bail law fight emblematic of Democrats' debate on crime

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It's hard to find anyone on board with New York Gov. Kathy Hochul's plan to toughen the state's bail laws, two years after they were retooled to keep people from being jailed because they are poor.

Reform advocates say the system should be left alone. Police leaders and even some of the governor's fellow Democrats say the proposal doesn't go far enough to roll back what they consider soft treatment of criminals.

The debate over bail in New York is emblematic of a fight taking place elsewhere in the U.S.

A spike in violence during the COVID-19 pandemic has Democrats eager to show they're tough on crime ahead of this year's midterm elections, from the White House on down, but the party is struggling to find a common message with progressives pushing the need for police reform and moderates focusing instead on rising crime rates.

Hochul's attempt to stake out a middle ground has provoked criticism from all points of the political spectrum.

"I think that's a sign that you're in the right place," she said of her plan in March. The proposal would continue to limit instances in which people would be required to post bail, but make more crimes eligible for detention and give judges more discretion to consider a defendant's criminal history.

New York changed its bail laws in response to public outcry over prisoners accused of minor crimes being held in jail for extended periods while awaiting trial because they couldn't afford to pay bail — a system where a person puts up cash as a guarantee that they will return to court.

The state's answer was to eliminate cash bail for many nonviolent offenses — a reform that frustrated some law enforcement officials who warned that people released back to the streets would commit new crimes.

But with violent crime up across America, crime rates have been an easy target and longstanding bogeyman for Republicans, who have wasted no opportunity to make it a campaign issue in races around the U.S., including governor's races in Illinois, Pennsylvania and elsewhere.

Democrats, bracing for tough midterm elections, are striving to prove they're responding, in some cases emphasizing efforts to provide more money to police departments while making scant mention of reforms they embraced a few years ago.

In Minnesota, Gov. Tim Walz is up for reelection and has been touring the state promoting his \$300 million public safety plan. He has not focused on the reform measures he signed after police killed George Floyd in the state almost two years ago.

Wisconsin's Democratic Gov. Tony Evers, who is also running for reelection this year, has been hammered by Republicans over crime and like Hochul, is facing bipartisan pressure to toughen bail laws.

A record-setting spate of homicides in Albuquerque has ratcheted up pressure on New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, including from some fellow Democrats. The first-term governor has joined efforts

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to ban pretrial release for certain violent crimes, though some legislators in her own party have balked at rolling back reforms that largely ended money bail.

President Joe Biden in his budget this week highlighted funding for police — for body cameras, crime prevention strategies, drug treatment, mental health and criminal justice reform.

This winter, he made a trip to New York City to stand with the city's new mayor, Eric Adams, a former police captain.

"The answer is not to defund the police," Biden said. "It is to give you the tools, the training, the funding to be partners, to be protectors and know the community."

In comparison, while campaigning for president, Biden instead spoke more about criminal justice reforms and the need to reverse some of the toughest measures of the 1994 crime bill he helped write.

In New York, the fierce debate over bail has been one factor that caused legislators to miss an April 1 deadline to pass a new state budget.

Hochul initially said she didn't want to touch the state's bail laws until she saw data indicating the reforms were responsible for a crime spike. Democrats who control the state Legislature likewise said they were uninterested in unwinding reforms.

A recent report from New York City's fiscal watchdog found that the percentage of people who committed new crimes after being released from jail hasn't budged since the bail reform measure passed.

But now, some Democrats have joined Republicans in calling for a repeal. They include U.S. Rep. Tom Suozzi of Long Island, who is challenging Hochul in the governor's race; Adams, who has made cracking down on crime in New York City a top priority; and former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who has started criticizing the bail reforms he signed as he contemplates running for office again.

At some point in recent weeks, Hochul changed her mind and drafted a plan to tweak the law. She avoided talking about it publicly, though, for days after it leaked to the media.

Nearly a week later, Hochul defended the plan in an op-ed, saying that while the state's bail laws were not the main cause of a rise in shootings during the pandemic, they needed to be changed.

Democrat Jumaane Williams, New York City's public advocate who is also challenging Hochul in the governor's race, said the governor "should show courage and leadership on this issue, or at the very least pick a side between fearmongering and facts."

It's unclear if Democrats controlling the statehouse will meet the governor somewhere in the middle as they continue negotiating, but the pressure has ratcheted up in recent days.

New York City's police commissioner visited Albany to press for reforms. Defenders of the current law were arrested for demonstrating outside the governor's office and one lawmaker, Democratic Assembly Member Latrice Walker of Brooklyn, was on day nine Thursday of a hunger strike to protest any rollbacks as negotiations continued.

UK hits record COVID-19 levels; nearly 5 million infected

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The prevalence of COVID-19 in the U.K. has reached record levels, with about 1 in 13 people estimated to be infected with the virus in the past week, according to the latest figures from Britain's official statistics agency.

Some 4.9 million people were estimated to have the coronavirus in the week ending March 26, up from 4.3 million recorded in the previous week, the Office for National Statistics said Friday. The latest surge is driven by the more transmissible omicron variant BA.2, which is the dominant variant across the U.K.

Hospitalizations and death rates are again rising, although the number of people dying with COVID-19 is still relatively low compared with earlier this year. Nonetheless, the latest estimates suggest that the steep climb in new infections since late February, when British Prime Minister Boris Johnson scrapped all remaining coronavirus restrictions in England, has continued well into March.

The figures came on the same day the government ended free rapid COVID-19 tests for most people in England, under Johnson's "living with COVID" plan. People who do not have health conditions that make

them more vulnerable to the virus now need to pay for tests to find out if they are infected.

"The government's 'living with COVID' strategy of removing any mitigations, isolation, free testing and a considerable slice of our surveillance amounts to nothing more than ignoring this virus going forwards," said Stephen Griffin, associate professor at the University of Leeds' medical school.

"Such unchecked prevalence endangers the protection afforded by our vaccines," he said. "Our vaccines are excellent, but they are not silver bullets and ought not to be left to bear the brunt of COVID in isolation."

More than 67% of people 12 years old and above in the U.K. have been vaccinated and had their booster or a third dose of the coronavirus vaccine. Beginning Saturday, parents can also book a low-dose vaccine for children between 5 to 12 years old in England.

James Naismith, a biology professor at the University of Oxford, said he believed that except for those who are completely shielded or not susceptible to the virus, most people in the country would likely be infected with the BA.2 variant by the summer.

"This is literally living with the virus by being infected with it," he said.

Video contrasts police depiction of stun gun on Black man

By JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A Tennessee police officer who used his stun gun on a DoorDash driver wrote an arrest report saying the man had become argumentative while denying he was speeding, refused to hand over identifying information, demanded to see a supervisor and stayed in his car when ordered to get out.

The driver — who faces charges of speeding, resisting arrest and disorderly conduct based on the officer's sworn affidavit — pressed record on his phone after he was pulled over. That recording, made public by the driver's attorney, tells a different story.

It shows Delane Gordon holding his driver's license as Collegedale Police Officer Evan Driskill stands with his taser in a firing position. "He said he pulled me over for a traffic violation and he's gonna Tase me. You can't do that officer because I called for your supervisor," Gordon says.

The white officer repeatedly shouts "get out!" at Gordon, who is Black.

"I have my license. What is the reason?" Gordon asks.

"You refused to give your information. I told you to get out of the car. Now you're resisting. Get out!" the officer says, pointing the stun gun closer to Gordon's body.

"Sir, I feel uncomfortable, please get your supervisor," Gordon pleads, at which point Driskill holsters the Taser and grabs him with both hands, trying to pull him down through the open door. "I don't give a (expletive) what you feel like. I said get out," the officer says.

"Why are you being like this," Gordon asks while being grabbed. "Is this how y'all really are?"

The officer then steps back and fires his stun gun. "Oh my God, that's not lawful sir. That's not lawful," Gordon says after crying out as he felt the jolt. The video released by his lawyer ends as Gordon reaches for the phone and his left leg swings toward the open door.

The exchange between Gordon and Driskill never escalated to the tragic level of higher-profile police encounters like the killing of George Floyd with an officer's knee on his neck in Minneapolis in 2020. But it demonstrated once again that in an era of ubiquitous recording devices, the accounts of police officers sometimes present an incomplete or distorted version of their engagement with the public.

Citing ongoing investigations, authorities have declined, for now, to release police video that could fill in the blanks where Gordon's camera wasn't recording. The police department says it plans to release its video once the investigations are closed.

Rashawn Ray, a senior fellow at The Brookings Institution, said the officer's behavior and sworn affidavit aren't surprising, given how police are trained.

"The way that officers interpret resistance, the way that officers interpret not listening or following their commands, shapes how they then proceed throughout the interaction, where oftentimes instead of continuing in a conversation, they escalate it with force," Ray said.

Video recordings, Ray said, are the "most powerful tool that people have used to show police use of

force and racial bias in policing.”

In the affidavit, Driskill described what happened before Gordon’s video started recording, from his perspective as an officer. He wrote that he clocked Gordon driving 49 miles per hour in a 35 mph zone. Gordon demanded to see the radar; he told him he’d have to go to court for that. And when Gordon wouldn’t get out of the car, Driskill said he asked a police chaplain who happened to be in his cruiser to call for backup, because his portable radio wouldn’t work.

Gordon’s attorney, Ryan Wheeler, said Gordon “did respectfully question the officer on exactly why he was pulled over” down the block from where he was delivering food for DoorDash, and the “given reason” was speeding.

The affidavit also describes what happened after Gordon’s video ends. The officer wrote that Gordon again refused to leave his car, this time after being stunned, and that once the 28-year-old did get out, Driskill held him to the ground and handcuffed him behind his back.

Three days before Gordon’s attorney released the video, the Hamilton County district attorney’s office announced that it asked the county sheriff’s office to investigate a March 10 traffic stop by the Collegedale Police Department in which the driver was charged with speeding, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. It provided no reason for the request and did not name anyone involved.

The police department said it would be “cooperating fully” with the sheriff’s probe while conducting its own investigation. It released the affidavit, as required by Tennessee law, in response to a public records request.

Driskill, whose personnel files shows he was sworn as a Collegedale officer in October, remains on regular duty, according to Lt. Jamie Heath.

Wheeler said Gordon has no prior criminal record, never posed a threat to the officer and was respectful throughout the exchange. He said their goal is to raise awareness and clear Gordon of the charges, and he said he’s confident this will happen.

Parkland shooter’s lawyers face tough task in jury selection

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Attorneys for Parkland, Florida, school shooter Nikolas Cruz will have one goal when jury selection starts Monday: to identify candidates who might give Cruz the single vote he needs to get a life sentence instead of death for the 2018 murders of 17 students and staff members. The process will involve a lot of educated guesses.

Court officials said perhaps 1,500 or more potential jurors could file through Circuit Judge Elizabeth Scherer’s courtroom over several weeks as she, prosecutors and Cruz’s public defenders select 12 panelists, plus eight alternates, for his penalty trial. Those chosen must say they can put aside their animosity toward Cruz for the 2018 massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and judge the case fairly. The potential jurors must also be available through September.

Cruz’s attorneys “should not even try to get a jury or juror who doesn’t know about the case because that is ignorance; you would have to be living under a rock,” said Orlando defense attorney Mark O’Mara. O’Mara came to national prominence after his successful 2013 defense of George Zimmerman, who was acquitted of murdering Black teenager Trayvon Martin. He is not involved in the Cruz case.

Jury candidates who declare that they can be objective will complete a questionnaire that dives into their backgrounds and asks whether they can handle viewing graphic evidence. They will then return in a few weeks for courtroom interviews, where they must declare that they are able to vote for the death penalty but also don’t believe it should be mandatory for murder.

Cruz, 23, pleaded guilty in October to 17 first-degree murders, 17 attempted murders and a jail assault, leaving the jury to decide only whether the former Stoneman Douglas student gets death or life without parole.

Instead of deciding whether someone is guilty based upon objective evidence, jurors sitting at this death penalty trial must answer a subjective question: Have prosecutors shown that aggravating factors — the

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number of deaths, the weeks of planning and the cruelty and horror of Cruz's actions — outweigh mitigating factors such as his lifelong mental illness and the death of his parents? For Cruz to get death, the jurors must all answer, "yes."

To get at least one "no" vote, Cruz's attorneys must show that his path to the murders wasn't "pure 100% personal-created intent," said O'Mara, who has defended about a dozen capital cases that ended with no death sentences imposed. "It is going to be difficult. ... Death is the default sentence in this case."

The fact that no one who opposes capital punishment on principle can be selected for the jury eliminates some female, minority, religious and liberal candidates who could potentially be sympathetic toward Cruz, Miami jury consultant and lawyer Geri Fischman said.

White people strongly support the death penalty, a Gallup poll last year showed, while most Black and Hispanic people oppose it. The survey also showed that more women oppose capital punishment than men, and that only a quarter of liberals support the death penalty compared with 70% of conservatives. Broward County is 2-to-1 Democratic.

Catholic Church leaders, some Protestant denominations and Judaism's major rabbinical organizations also oppose the death penalty on theological grounds, although many individual members support it in practice. "Death-qualified juries are skewed in favor of the prosecution," Fischman said.

This won't be the first time Scherer, prosecutors and Cruz's attorneys begin picking a jury for him. In October, Cruz faced trial for assaulting a jail guard nine months after the shooting. Prosecutors wanted a conviction to use as an aggravating factor in their argument for the death penalty.

Almost 300 prospective jurors were screened, 10 times what is typical in a Florida assault case. About half said they couldn't judge Cruz fairly, and three women cried just seeing him. The other half said they could be just, but the process ended with Cruz's sudden guilty plea.

Until 2016, a Florida judge could impose the death penalty if a majority of jurors agreed. But after the U.S. and Florida supreme courts mandated a higher bar, the Republican-majority Legislature amended the law to require unanimity. This is the system used in 18 of the 26 other states with capital punishment.

That change gives Cruz a chance, but the jury's composition is key, O'Mara and Fischman note.

Both prosecutors and defense attorneys can strike a potential juror if they are able to persuade Scherer that the person's background or answers demonstrates unfairness. Cruz's attorneys might challenge school employees, for example, or someone with a relative who died at the hands of another.

Both sides receive 10 peremptory strikes for any reason except race or gender. Scherer has indicated she might add more, given the case's high profile.

Fischman said that if she were advising the defense, she wouldn't preclude any occupations, ages or economic groups. Instead, she said she would look closely for "stealth jurors": candidates who skew answers to be picked so they can vote for death.

"Anyone who tells you repeatedly they are going to be fair, that they have no biases, that they have no preexisting views on this case, is likely hiding something," she said. "Someone who says they have no views on a shooting where innocent children were killed is not being ... forthright."

O'Mara said he might seek racial minorities and jurors with relatives who have been criminal defendants because they might be "more sensitized to the inconsistencies and biases of the judicial system."

He said he would avoid accountants, engineers and others whose occupations require "very precise" answers. Such professionals use a mental scale to precisely weigh the aggravating and mitigating factors — a battle Cruz cannot win with 17 dead victims, he said.

"When you get to that kind of analysis, you get away from what the defense wants: the humanity" of the jurors and the defendant, he said.

The bottom line: A case like Cruz's has no certainties for the defense.

"You are, in effect, playing to one juror — you just don't know which," O'Mara said.

Today in History: April 3, Unabomber arrested

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

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Today is Sunday, April 3, the 93rd day of 2022. There are 272 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 3, 1973, the first handheld portable telephone was demonstrated for reporters on a New York City street corner as Motorola executive Martin Cooper called Joel S. Engel of Bell Labs.

On this date:

In 1865, Union forces occupied the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia.

In 1882, outlaw Jesse James was shot to death in St. Joseph, Missouri, by Robert Ford, a member of James' gang.

In 1936, Bruno Hauptmann was electrocuted in Trenton, New Jersey, for the kidnap-murder of Charles Lindbergh Jr.

In 1942, during World War II, Japanese forces began their final assault on Bataan against American and Filipino troops who surrendered six days later; the capitulation was followed by the notorious Bataan Death March.

In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Smith v. Allwright*, struck down a Democratic Party of Texas rule that allowed only white voters to participate in Democratic primaries.

In 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed the Marshall Plan, designed to help European allies rebuild after World War II and resist communism.

In 1968, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. delivered what turned out to be his final speech, telling a rally of striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, that "I've been to the mountaintop" and "seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land!" (About 20 hours later, King was felled by an assassin's bullet at the Lorraine Motel.)

In 1974, deadly tornadoes began hitting wide parts of the South and Midwest before jumping across the border into Canada; more than 300 fatalities resulted from what became known as the Super Outbreak.

In 1978, at the Academy Awards, Woody Allen's "Annie Hall" was named best picture of 1977; its co-star, Diane Keaton, won best actress while Richard Dreyfuss was honored as best actor for "The Goodbye Girl."

In 1996, Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski (kah-ZIHN'-skee) was arrested at his remote Montana cabin.

In 2014, David Letterman announced during a taping of the "Late Show" on CBS that he would retire as host in 2015. (Stephen Colbert (kohl-BEHR') was named as his replacement a week later.)

In 2020, President Donald Trump announced new federal guidelines recommending that Americans wear face coverings when in public to help fight the spread of the coronavirus, but Trump immediately said he had no intention of following that advice himself; he said he could not envision himself covering his face while sitting in the Oval Office greeting world leaders.

Ten years ago: Mitt Romney tightened his grip on the Republican presidential nomination, sweeping primaries in Wisconsin, Maryland and Washington, D.C. In a speech to the annual meeting of The Associated Press, President Barack Obama accused Republican leaders of becoming so radical and rigid that even the late Ronald Reagan could not win a current GOP primary were he running. Baylor finished off an undefeated season with an 80-61 win over Notre Dame in the NCAA women's basketball championship game.

Five years ago: A divided Senate Judiciary Committee panel voted 11-9 along party lines to favorably recommend Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch to the full Senate. A suicide bombing aboard a subway train in St. Petersburg, Russia, left 16 people dead and wounded more than 50; authorities identified the bomber as a 22-year old Kyrgyz-born Russian national. The NHL announced it would not participate in the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea. North Carolina scored the last eight points for a 71-65 win over Gonzaga and an NCAA title.

One year ago: Gonzaga beat UCLA 93-90, while Baylor roared to a 78-59 victory over Houston, to advance to the championship game of the NCAA basketball tournament, which would be won by Baylor.

Today's Birthdays: Conservationist Dame Jane Goodall is 88. Actor William Gaunt is 85. Songwriter Jeff Barry is 84. Actor Eric Braeden is 81. Actor Marsha Mason is 80. Singer Wayne Newton is 80. Singer Tony Orlando is 78. Comedy writer Pat Proft is 75. Folk-rock singer Richard Thompson is 73. Country musician Curtis Stone (Highway 101) is 72. Blues singer-guitarist John Mooney is 67. Rock musician Mick Mars

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(Motley Crue) is 66. Actor Alec Baldwin is 64. Actor David Hyde Pierce is 63. Rock singer John Thomas Griffith (Cowboy Mouth) is 62. Comedian-actor Eddie Murphy is 61. Rock singer-musician Mike Ness (Social Distortion) is 60. Rock singer Sebastian Bach is 54. Rock musician James MacDonough is 52. Olympic gold medal ski racer Picabo Street is 51. Actor Jennie Garth is 50. Actor Jamie Bamber is 49. Actor Adam Scott is 49. Christian rock musician Drew Shirley (Switchfoot) is 48. Comedian Aries Spears is 47. Actor Matthew Goode is 44. Actor Cobie Smulders is 40. Rock-pop singer Leona Lewis is 37. Actor Amanda Bynes is 36. Actor-comedian Rachel Bloom is 35. Actor Hayley Kiyoko is 31. Rock musician Sam Kiszka (Greta Van Fleet) is 23.