

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 1 of 69

[1- Upcoming Events](#)

[1- Truss Pros Help Wanted](#)

[2- POPS Concert held Sunday](#)

[8- Praire Doc: Anything from Acne to Zika](#)

[9- Weekly Vikings Roundup](#)

[10- Weather Pages](#)

[15- Daily Devotional](#)

[16- 2022 Community Events](#)

[17- Subscription Form](#)

[18- News from the Associated Press](#)

UpComing Events

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, 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.

Wednesday, April 6

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Emmanuel: 6 p.m. Soup Supper (Nigeria Circle is host), 7 p.m. Lenten Service

St. John's: Lenten Service, 7 p.m.

School Breakfast: Egg omelets.

School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.

Senior Menu: Scalloped potatoes with ham, peas, sunset salad, cookie, whole wheat bread.

Thursday, April 7

8:34 a.m. to 3 p.m.: FFA CDE in Groton

6 p.m.: FFA Banquet

Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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

"Your talent determines what you can do. Your motivation determines how much you are willing to do. Your attitude determines how well you do it."

-Lou Holtz



Friday, April 8

11:30 a.m.: Track meet in Miller

Saturday, April 9

Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park

Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm

Monday, April 11

7 p.m.: School Board Meeting

Tuesday, April 12

ELECTION DAY IN GROTON

11 a.m.: Track meet in Groton

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!

To apply call 605-277-4937 or go to www.uslbn.com/careers and search for jobs in Britton, SD.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 2 of 69

POPS Concert held Sunday



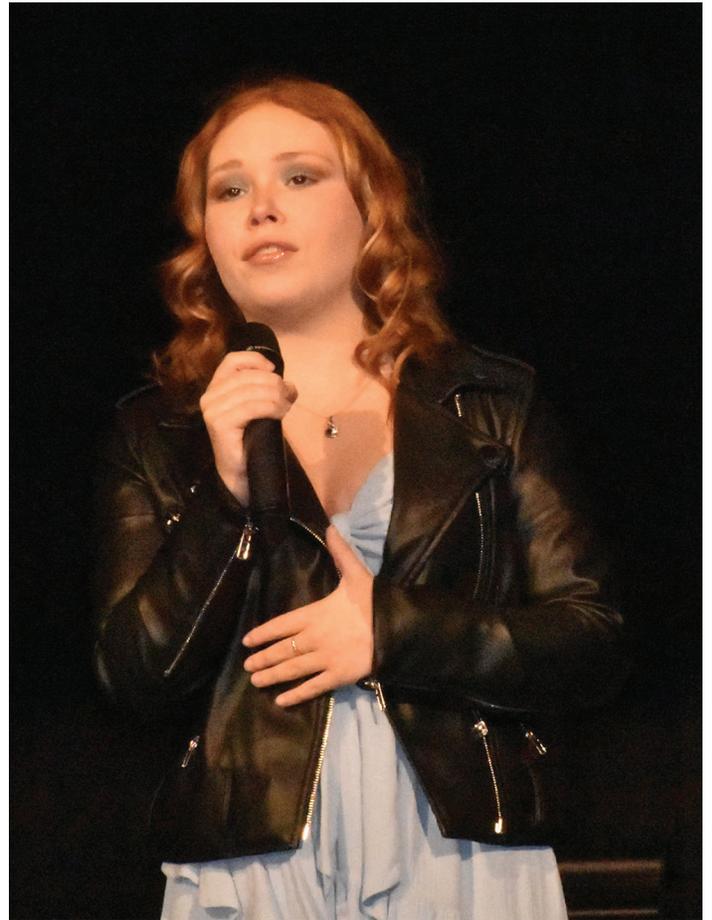
The annual POPS Concert was held Sunday with two performances. The Flex Band performed several selections: "Superstition," "Bohemian Rhapsody," "Respect," "Disco Lives" and "YMCA." (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 3 of 69



Ashtyn Bahr sang, "Reflection." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Trinity Smith sang, "Like My Father." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Sarah Jacobs sang, "Dancing Queen." (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 4 of 69



Kianna Sander sang, "Bored." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Anna Bisbee sang, "Good Morning Baltimore." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



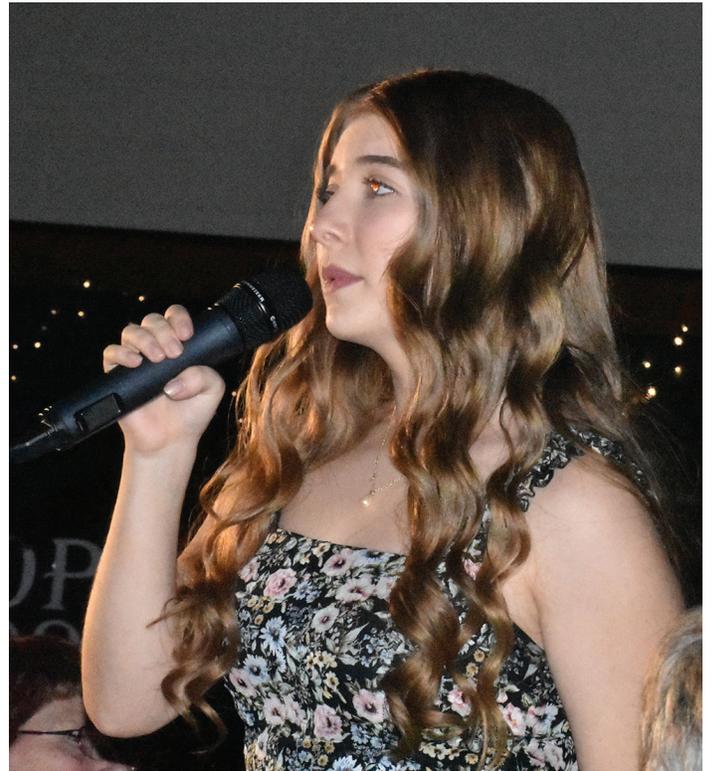
Camryn Kurtz sang, "Imagine." (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 5 of 69



Cadance Tullis sang, "Never Enough." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Shaylee Peterson sang, "Make You Feel My Love." (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Carter Barse sang, "Vienna." He was accompanied by **Elliana Weismantel** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 6 of 69



Kamryn Flihs and Jaeger Kampa were the masters of ceremony. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Julianna Kosel sang, "I Will Always Remember You." (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 7 of 69



The Show Choir, aka Prismatic Sensations, performed, "All That Jazz," "Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend," "Only in New York," "Roarin' Twenties," and "A Little Party Never Killed Nobody." (Photos by Paul Kosel)



Anything from Acne to Zika

I enjoy visiting with my colleagues who are medical specialists. We dive in and explore the depths of a particular condition. However, there is something to say about the breadth of knowledge that a family medicine physician is expected to have. Your family doctor can run through the alphabet of conditions from acne to the zika virus.

A 2004 study in the Annals of Family Medicine found that a family medicine physician managed an average of 3.05 problems per clinic visit. For patients over 65 years of age, that number went up to 3.88 problems and patients with diabetes had an average of 4.60 problems addressed at each visit. A specialist physician will generally focus on one problem at each visit.

However, patients are not made up of individual problems. The body functions as a unit and issues in one area can affect another unrelated organ system. We know that chronic pain can lead to depression and vice versa. Stooped posture due to compression fractures from osteoporosis can lead to lung issues as the ribs cannot open up as fully as they normally do. We continue to learn more on how the micro biome of the bacteria in the body affect things from a person's weight to immune system function.

This is why it is so important to have a primary care physician and to make sure they have access to your complete medical history. With a comprehensive view of your records, symptoms that might otherwise seem unrelated can be assessed and may assist with diagnosis. Talk to your doctor to determine if all your medical information and testing results are consolidated into one record, especially if you have doctors who work in different health care systems.

The primary care physician also serves as a guide between the patient and the specialist, offering valuable medical detail to the specialist and providing clarification to the patient.

Recently I had a patient who timidly started their question with the preface, "I'm not sure if I should ask you this, but..." I quickly reassured them that in primary care, any question is fair game. If it is something that I can answer, I will. If I do not have the answer, I can do some research, consult with a colleague, or refer you on to someone who does have that answer for you. So, no matter your condition from acne and amblyopia to zika virus and zoster, your family doctor should have you covered. Go ahead, ask anything from A to Z!

Jill Kruse, D.O. is part of The Prairie Doc® team of physicians and currently practices as a hospitalist in Brookings, South Dakota. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



By Jill Kruse, D.O.

Weekly Vikings Roundup

First round draft options

By Duane & Jack Kolsrud

For many years the Mike Zimmer and Rick Spielman regime had an affinity for drafting defensive backs while avoiding the immediate need for an offensive lineman, it seems a bit ironic that all indications are pointing to O'Connell and company using their first draft pick on a cornerback.

Having secured three veteran offensive linemen in the free agency market, the Vikings are now looking to secure a top corner to play opposite future Hall of Famer Patrick Peterson, who the Vikings just re-signed this past week for another season. Peterson's veteran leadership will be a stabilizing force for a young defensive backfield.

So who do the draft experts think the Vikings will take with the 12th pick in the 2022 draft. At this point, it is coming down to three players.

The highest rated player on the list is Ahmad Gardner of Cincinnati. Gardner is a tall 6'3" lockdown defender that would appear to be a perfect fit to play on the opposite side of Peterson and learn the professional ropes from one of the best. The only problem is as the highest ranked cornerback, will he still be available when the Vikings are on the clock.

More realistically is a toss-up between Trent McDuffie of Washington and Derek Stingley, Jr. of LSU. The biggest knock on both players is they are much shorter than Gardner- coming in around 6 feet tall and 195 pounds. McDuffie is considered the more physical of the two and a really good tackler, possibly reminding Viking fans of the days of Antoine Winfield. Stingley is touted as having more potential and would benefit from playing under the guide of Peterson.

Whoever the Vikings decide to pick, they are going to get a very skilled player. Being this is the first draft for Kwesi Odofo-Mensah and Kevin O'Connell, it would seem unlikely they would trade down out of this spot, something Spielman was known for doing to acquire more picks in the later rounds.

As mentioned earlier, the Vikings can move in this direction due to the acquisition of three veteran offensive linemen. Jesse Davis was with the Miami Dolphins the past 4 years and a very versatile lineman, playing both guard and tackle, playing on the right side for most of his career. Chris Reed, who played in 14 games for the Indianapolis Colts in 2021, is coming back home. Originally from Omaha, Reed played at Minnesota State-Mankato during the Adam Thielen days. He is excited to get back to Minnesota and play in purple & gold once again. The final addition was Adam Schlottman from the Denver Broncos.

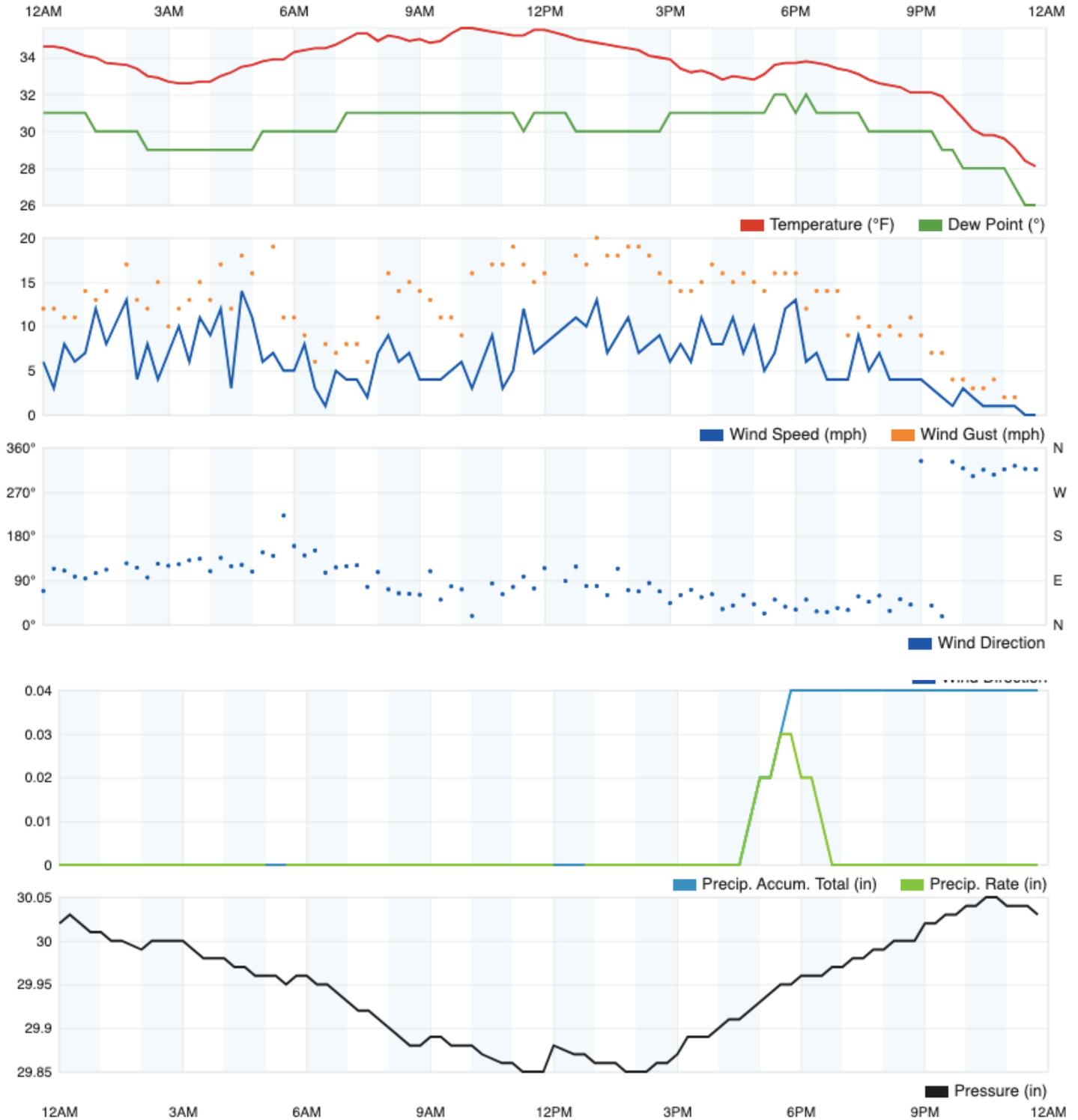
These three along with second year Viking, Wyatt Davis, will all be battling for the starting right guard spot on the Vikings offensive line- a position that has been the achilles heal for the Vikings for many seasons.

Unless something drastically happens in the coming weeks, a late free agent pickup or trade at the cornerback position, it appears this will be the direction of the 2022 Minnesota Vikings. There's a new buzz around the Twin Cities and this Viking squad.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 10 of 69

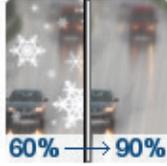
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 11 of 69

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



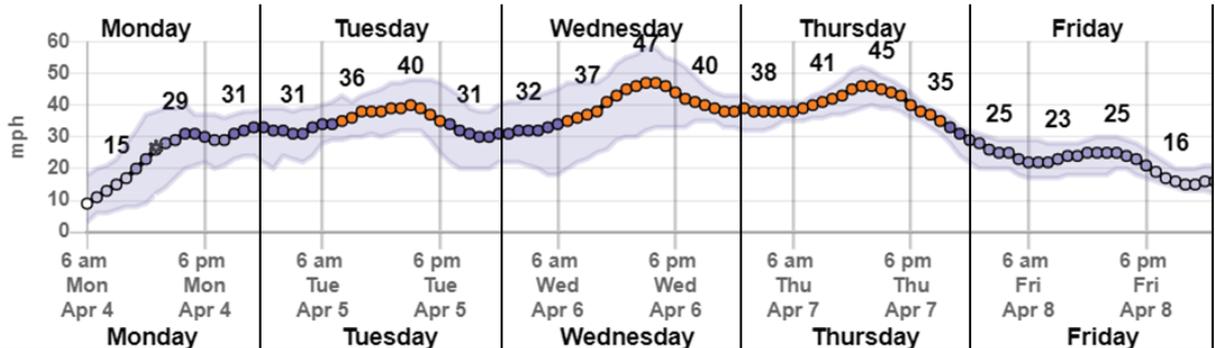
Chance Rain and Breezy

High: 56 °F



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Area Maximum Wind Gust Forecast



Increasing Winds
Gusts 20 to 40 mph

Windy
Gusts 30 to 48 mph

Windy
Gusts 35 to 55 mph

Windy
Gusts 40 to 55 mph

Decreasing Winds
Gusts 18 to 30 mph



Critical Fire Weather
Conditions over south
central SD

Difficult Driving Conditions for
high profile vehicles

Rain Likely over e SD
Critical Fire Weather
Conditions possible
over central SD

Wintry mix
in the morning
Rain Likely
during the day
Changing to Snow
in the evening

Snow
ending west to east

Dry

Busy week of weather ahead! Today will be marked by morning patchy to dense fog, and increasing winds that when combined with dry conditions result in critical fire weather conditions over south central South Dakota. Winds will increase even more this evening into Tuesday. Each afternoon will bring wind gusts of 30 to around 50 mph. The strongest winds will create difficult driving conditions for high profile vehicles. Light accumulating snow of less than 1" will be possible Wednesday morning. A higher chance of accumulating snow is expected Wednesday night into Thursday, mainly east of the James River, focusing on the higher terrain of the Sisseton Hills.

Broton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 12 of 69

When the Wind Blows

Identify an interior room in your house or at work that you can take shelter in during high wind warnings.



Head Inside Immediately

If you are driving and aren't near a sturdy building, hold the steering wheel with both hands and slow down.



Be Careful on the Road

Keep a distance from high profile vehicles.

High winds can create dangerous fallen or blowing objects.



Stay Clear of Hazards From Above



Stay Clear of Trees



Be aware of Loose Outdoor Items



Strong Winds Tonight through Thursday

Maximum Wind Gust Forecast

	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				
Aberdeen	22	31	37	38	39	40	32	29	40	44	41	39	43	46	40	31	25	25	21
Britton	20	30	36	39	38	39	31	25	36	41	40	39	40	44	38	31	28	29	23
Eagle Butte	28	33	28	37	40	44	44	47	58	51	41	46	49	41	29	21	20	17	
Eureka	22	35	37	37	39	40	38	35	44	49	46	39	45	46	41	28	24	24	17
Gettysburg	26	38	38	36	41	44	40	39	45	53	48	40	47	48	43	30	25	25	20
Kennebec	22	37	37	37	39	43	40	39	46	52	49	40	47	49	41	30	25	26	21
McIntosh	32	40	35	39	44	48	47	43	49	56	54	43	46	49	44	26	18	23	21
Milbank	8	21	26	29	31	33	25	25	30	37	36	35	38	41	37	29	26	28	24
Miller	20	32	37	38	38	39	35	36	41	47	45	38	43	45	39	29	25	25	18
Mobridge	26	33	33	31	38	39	37	36	43	49	45	39	43	45	39	22	21	22	18
Murdo	26	38	36	38	41	45	41	43	49	56	49	41	48	52	43	30	24	24	20
Pierre	21	33	31	30	37	40	39	37	45	51	46	39	47	48	40	28	21	23	18
Redfield	20	32	38	39	39	40	33	33	41	46	43	39	41	45	40	30	26	28	21
Sisseton	12	24	29	30	35	38	28	28	33	40	39	38	43	44	40	32	28	30	24
Watertown	12	25	30	39	37	37	30	26	33	41	39	38	41	43	38	32	29	30	26
Wheaton	9	22	29	35	33	32	25	22	26	33	35	36	37	40	36	28	26	28	22



Winds will be a concern this week, especially Wednesday and Thursday.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 13 of 69

Today in Weather History

April 4, 1961: High winds of 40-60mph, with 80-90mph gusts, affected Central and Western South Dakota. The most extensive property damage occurred in the Pierre area. The roof was blown off, and one wall damaged at a new motel. One trailer home was blown over, numerous windows and large signboards were destroyed, and roofs sustained damages in Pierre. Total loss estimated \$10,000.

1804: A group of tornadoes slashed a 120-mile path across seven counties in Georgia and one county in South Carolina killing 11 people near Augusta, GA. The tornado's path through heavy timber was still visible some 71 years later as noted in an Army Signal Corps survey.

1923: An estimated F4 tornado killed 15 people and injured 150 at Alexandria and Pineville, LA. 142 homes and businesses in Pineville were destroyed.

1933 - Pigeon River Bridge, MN, reported 28 inches of snow, which established the state 24 hour snowfall record. (4th-5th) (The Weather Channel)

1966: One of the strongest tornadoes in Florida's history moved in from the Gulf of Mexico and ripped through Pinellas, Hillsborough, Polk, and Osceola County. Damage was very severe in the towns of Gibsonia and Galloway in Polk County. 11 people were killed, and 350 were injured. The tornado was classified as F4.

1973 - Sandia Crest, NM, reported a snow depth of 95 inches, a record for the state of New Mexico. (The Weather Channel)

1977: A Southern Airways DC-9 jet crashed near New Hope, Georgia, after being struck by large hail. The hail and associated heavy precipitation caused the engines to flame out. Seventy-two people (including nine on the ground) died.

1977: A massive F5 tornado moved across northern Birmingham, Alabama, killing 22 people and injuring 130. The tornado cut a 15-mile path from just northwest of Birmingham to the town of Tarrant. 167 homes were destroyed, primarily in the Smithfield Estates subdivision. Daniel Payne College sustained substantial damage. At one point, the tornado was three-quarters of a mile wide. The tornado crossed busy I-65, tossing cars and trucks like they were toys. Other tornadoes killed one other person in Alabama and one person in Georgia that day.

1983 - Colorado was in the midst of a three day winter storm. Buckhorn Mountain, located west of Fort Collins, received 64 inches of snow. (Storm Data)

1987 - Rains of five to eight inches drenched eastern New York State, and ten persons were killed in a bridge collapse over Schoharie Creek. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Sunny and warm weather prevailed across the nation. Fort Smith AR reported a record high of 90 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Lower Mississippi Valley to the Southern Appalachians. The thunderstorms spawned seventeen tornadoes, including one which caused two million dollars damage at Baldwin AL. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 90 mph at Bremen GA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - A deep low pressure system in northern New York State brought heavy snow to parts of western and central New York during the day. The snowfall total of 5.8 inches at Buffalo was a record for the date, and 9.5 inches was reported at Rochester. Snowfall totals ranged up to 11 inches at Warsaw. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 14 of 69

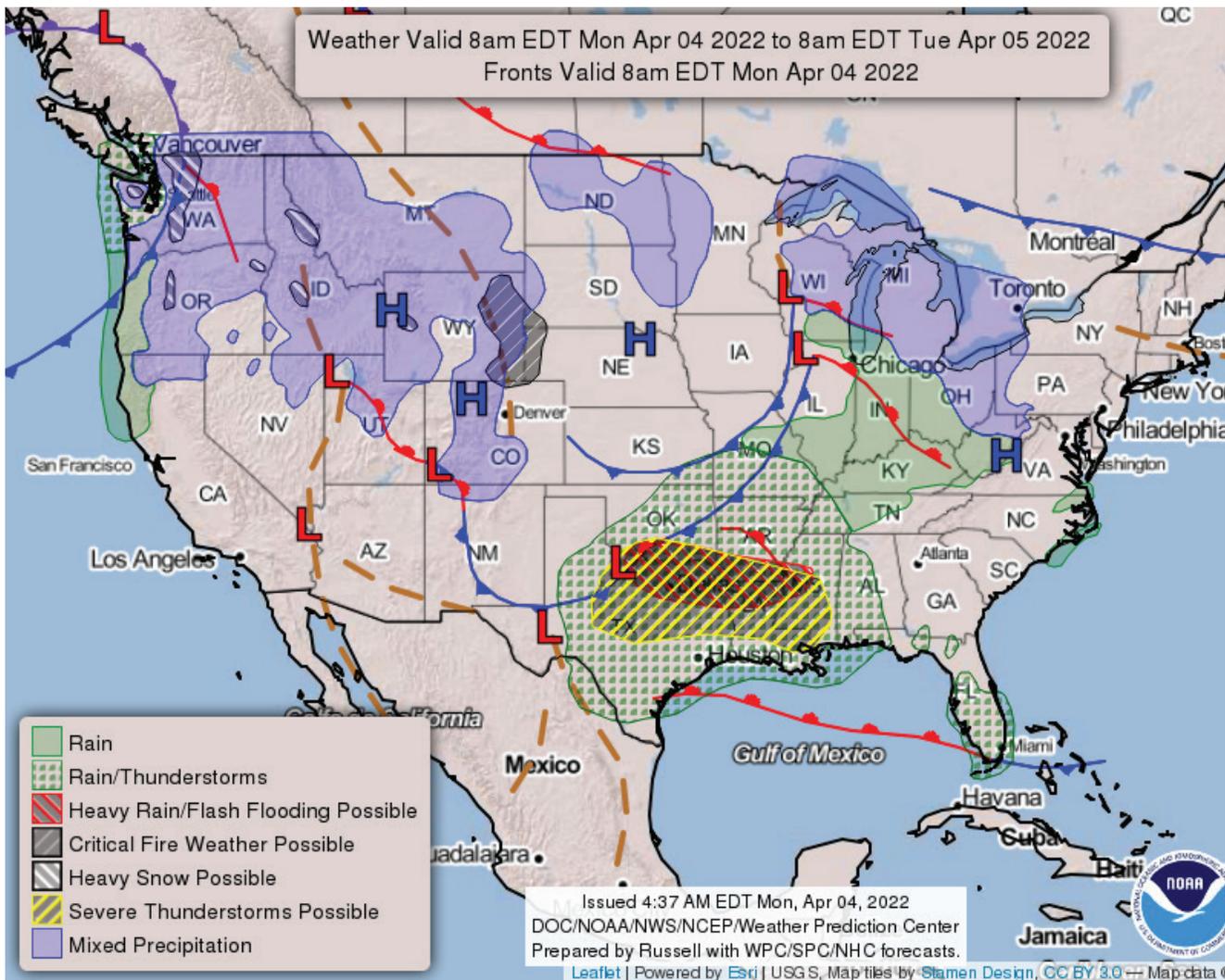
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 36 °F at 9:59 AM
Low Temp: 28 °F at 11:51 PM
Wind: 23 mph at 5:13 AM
Precip: 0.04

Day length: 13 hours, 00 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1921
Record Low: -6 in 2018
Average High: 52°F
Average Low: 27°F
Average Precip in April.: 0.17
Precip to date in April.: 0.04
Average Precip to date: 2.23
Precip Year to Date: 1.84
Sunset Tonight: 8:05:44 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:02:59 AM



Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 15 of 69



CRITICISM - GOOD OR BAD?

Criticism can be very beneficial. It can help us correct a problem or avoid making the same mistake again and again. Or, it may damage or destroy the hope that is within someone who is trying to do something good and makes a few mistakes along the way.

When the great Polish pianist, Paderewski, first chose to study the piano, his teacher embarrassed him and said, "Your hands are too small. You will never be able to master the piano."

When the great American evangelist, Moody, closed a service, a critic said, "I counted eighteen mistakes in your grammar tonight." Thinking for a moment, Moody graciously replied, "I am using all the grammar I know for the glory of God. Are you doing the same?"

The criticism directed at Paderewski and Moody did not cripple them; it challenged them. History records their stories, and though they had their problems, they went on to great things.

Criticism properly given and directed at something a person can change or improve on can be a gift from God. David wrote, "Let a righteous man strike me - it is a kindness; let him rebuke me - it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it."

People who love us will want the best for us. They will offer us suggestions on what we can do to improve our witness, service or testimony to the Lord. It is important to listen patiently, willingly and openly. Notice one word: "righteous." People who are right with God want our best.

Prayer: Lord, we ask You to bring people into our lives who will help us to become our best and become like You. We need accountability. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Let a righteous man strike me—that is a kindness; let him rebuke me—that is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it, for my prayer will still be against the deeds of evildoers. Psalm 141:5

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 16 of 69

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)

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 17 of 69

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

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News from the Associated Press

Ravnsborg impeachment probe to cost taxpayers at least \$87K

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The leader of the South Dakota House says impeachment proceedings into Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg will cost state taxpayers at least \$87,000.

Republican South Dakota House Speaker Spencer Gosch said Friday the House Select Committee on Investigation racked up the bills on attorney fees while it looked into the events surrounding a fatal crash with a pedestrian in 2020, the Argus Leader reported.

The committee this week issued a formal recommendation that Ravnsborg, 45, should not face impeachment. Before its decision, a special counsel directed the nine representatives through 10 separate meetings and hundreds of documents, videos, recordings and other materials.

Rapid City attorney Sara Frankenstein, the special prosecutor, said an email Saturday that she personally logged 208 hours working with the House Select Committee on Investigation. A paralegal working under her also billed 84 hours. Additional clerical work not reflected in those hours, Frankenstein said.

"That file was over 10,000 pages, not to mention how many hours of video and audio recordings," said Gosch, who also served as committee chairman. "Her and her team did a thorough and meticulous job."

A House committee concluded its monthslong inquiry last week by voting 6-2 on party lines to recommend that Ravnsborg, a Republican, be cleared in the death of Joseph Boever, who was walking near a rural highway. The attorney general last year pleaded no contest to a pair of misdemeanors and was required to pay fines.

Battle heats up over remaining federal rental assistance

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

In her office at a nonprofit in central Nebraska, Karen Rathke routinely encounters residents still stung by the pandemic and hoping to get help with their rent.

Rathke, president of the Heartland United Way, was hoping to tap into an additional \$120 million in federal Emergency Rental Assistance to help them. But that money, part of what's known as ERA2, is at risk after Republican Gov. Pete Ricketts said he doesn't want it.

Many other states have in recent months returned tens of millions of dollars in unused rental assistance because they have so few renters — but only Nebraska has flat out refused the aid.

"I'm very concerned about not having anything," Rathke said of the federal money, which can be allocated over the next three years for everything from rent to services preventing eviction to affordable housing activities.

"All these nonprofits, when people come to them asking for help, the bucket will be empty," she said. "It is hard to tell people no, to tell people that we don't have the funds to help them."

The debate is playing out across the country as the Treasury Department begins reallocating some of the \$46.5 billion in rental assistance from places slow to spend to others that are running out of funds.

States and localities have until September to spend their share of the first \$25 billion allocated, known as ERA1, and the second \$21.55 billion, known as ERA2, by 2025. So far, Treasury says \$30 billion has been spent or allocated through February.

Treasury announced earlier this month that over \$1 billion of ERA1 funds would be moved, for a total of \$2.3 billion reallocated this year. Larger states like California, New York, New Jersey and Texas are getting hundreds of millions of dollars in additional money. Native American tribes, including the Oglala Sioux Lakota in South Dakota and Chippewa Cree in Montana, are also receiving tens of millions of dollars in additional help.

Those losing money are almost all smaller Republican states with large rural populations and fewer renters. Many were slow to spend their share as required by program rules, so they either voluntarily returned money or had it taken. Some, like South Dakota, Wyoming and New Hampshire, unsuccessfully

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 19 of 69

pitched to use the money for other things like affordable housing.

Treasury officials, housing advocates and many Republican governors argue there is still plenty of money to help renters in these states and that the reallocation gets money where it's most needed. Montana, for example, returned \$54.6 million but still has \$224.5 million. West Virginia returned more than \$42.4 million but still has \$224.7 million, according to Treasury.

"We are trying to reallocate the best we can," said Gene Sperling, who is charged with overseeing implementation of President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus rescue package. "This is a balancing act, but one that is rooted in commitment to getting the most funds to the most people in need as possible."

North Dakota returned \$150 million of its \$352 million, saying it couldn't effectively spend all the money by the deadline. The state believes the remaining funds are sufficient to meet the needs of those who are eligible.

Some Democratic lawmakers disagree.

"Outrageous and unacceptable: turning back rental assistance funds when applications are piling up and people are being evicted," tweeted Democratic Rep. Karla Rose Hanson, of Fargo.

South Dakota was forced to return more than \$81 million — though more than \$9 million went to Native American tribes in the state. Gov. Kristi Noem suggested the money was not necessary, adding: "Our renters enjoy something even better than government hand-outs: a job."

But Democratic Sen. Reynold Nesiba said there was a lack of awareness about the rental assistance and criticized the state for not doing more to promote it. He pointed to a \$5 million tourism advertising campaign that was paid for with coronavirus relief funds and questioned why that level of promotion didn't happen for pandemic relief programs.

Meanwhile, organizations that are helping administer the rental assistance still available expect a continued need. The state has long faced a run on affordable housing, which has only been exacerbated during the pandemic.

"Housing costs are just too high," said Sandy Miller, who coordinates the rental assistance program for an organization called Community Action in the western half of South Dakota. "It's harder for them to get in a home, it's harder for them to stay in their home."

Several states argued the reallocation addresses a flaw in the program, which created a funding formula based on population, not the number of renters in a state.

"Congress ... did not take into consideration Wyoming's small population, income levels, actual renters' needs, and that the majority of Wyoming households — 70% — are owner occupied," said Rachel Girt, the state's rental assistance communication coordinator, after the state returned \$164 million out of \$352 million. Another \$2.8 million was shifted to the Northern Arapaho Tribal Housing Program and Eastern Shoshone Housing Authority.

Josh Hanford, commissioner of the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, noted that the \$352 million it received far surpassed the \$25 million given to Memphis, which has a similar population.

"As long as we're able to serve all our eligible households, hopefully folks will see that there is greater need in other parts of the country that have received a lot less assistance per household," Hanford said when asked about the state returning \$31 million.

In Nebraska, the loss of funds is projected to hit rural areas hardest.

The state program already reallocated \$85 million of its \$158 million in ERA1 to its biggest cities of Omaha and Lincoln and their respective counties. It still has nearly \$30 million. Without the additional \$120 million in ERA2 money, an analysis by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Center on Children, Families and the Law found that tenants in Omaha and Lincoln will still have help after September, but those in other counties will not.

Ricketts, the Nebraska governor, defended the decision not to take the additional money.

The state "has received and distributed an unprecedented amount of federal funding to help Nebraskans weather the storm over these past two years," he wrote in an opinion column. "But at a certain point, we must acknowledge that the storm has passed and get back to the Nebraska Way. We must guard

against becoming a welfare state where people are incentivized not to work and encouraged to rely on government handouts well after an emergency is over.”

But housing advocates say his decision will leave many vulnerable tenants without a lifeline. Tenants in rural areas often have access to fewer resources, including affordable housing, internet access and reliable transport.

Lawmakers passed a bill last month requiring the state to apply for the money. But Ricketts vetoed the bill, saying the state “must guard against big government socialism.” If lawmakers don’t override his veto, the money is likely to be reallocated by Treasury to other states.

“We know from communities across Nebraska that the need is not only there, but is fairly severe,” said Erin Feichtinger, director of policy and advocacy for the social service agency Together.

“There is really no good reason to pass up these funds. It’s money that is allocated to Nebraskans,” she said. “Nothing bad will happen if we accept this funding, but lots of bad things can if we don’t.”

Senate panel to vote on Jackson nomination to Supreme Court

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats are launching a whirlwind of votes and Senate floor action Monday with the goal of confirming Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black woman on the Supreme Court by the end of the week.

The Senate Judiciary Committee kicks off Monday morning with a vote on whether to move Jackson’s nomination to the Senate floor. Democrats will then wind the nomination through the 50-50 Senate, with a final vote in sight for President Joe Biden’s pick to replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer.

After more than 30 hours of hearings and interrogation from Republicans over her record, Jackson is on the brink of making history as the third Black justice and only the sixth woman in the court’s more than 200-year history. Democrats — and at least one Republican — cite her deep experience in her nine years on the federal bench and the chance for her to become the first former public defender on the court.

The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said Thursday that the high regard for Jackson after a combative four days of hearings is “evidence of the strength that she brings to this nomination and the value that she will bring to the Supreme Court.”

The committee could deadlock on Monday’s vote, 11-11, meaning Democrats will have to spend additional hours on the Senate floor to “discharge” her nomination from committee. While it won’t delay the process for long, it’s another blow for Democrats who had hoped to confirm Jackson with bipartisan support.

A deadlocked vote would be “a truly unfortunate signal of the continued descent into dysfunction of our confirmation process,” said Delaware Sen. Chris Coons, a Democrat on the committee.

The committee hasn’t deadlocked on a nomination since 1991, when a motion to send the nomination of current Justice Clarence Thomas to the floor with a “favorable” recommendation failed on a 7-7 vote. The committee then voted to send the nomination to the floor without a recommendation, meaning it could still be brought up for a vote.

Either way, Democrats are ready to spend time on the discharge Monday afternoon, if necessary. The Senate would then move to a series of procedural steps before a final confirmation vote later in the week.

While none of the Republicans on the committee is expected to support Jackson, Democrats will have at least one GOP vote in favor on the floor — Maine Sen. Susan Collins, who announced last week that she will support the nominee. Collins said that even though she may not always agree with her, Jackson “possesses the experience, qualifications and integrity to serve as an associate justice on the Supreme Court.”

It’s unclear so far whether any other Republicans will join her. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky set the tone for the party last week when he said he “cannot and will not” support her, citing GOP concerns raised in the hearing about her sentencing record and her support from liberal advocacy groups.

Collins and Sens. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina were the only three

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 21 of 69

to vote for Jackson when the Senate confirmed her as an appeals court judge last year. Graham said Thursday he won't support her this time around; Murkowski says she's still deciding.

Collins' support likely saves Democrats from having to use Vice President Kamala Harris' tiebreaking vote to confirm President Joe Biden's pick, and Biden called Collins on Wednesday to thank her after her announcement, according to the senator's office. The president had called her at least three times before the hearings, part of a larger push to win a bipartisan vote for his historic nominee.

It is expected that all 50 Democrats will support Jackson, though one notable moderate Democrat, Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, hasn't yet said how she will vote.

Top Pakistan court hears arguments in major political crisis

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan's top court began hearing arguments Monday on whether Prime Minister Imran Khan and his allies had the legal right to dissolve parliament and set the stage for early elections.

The opposition is challenging the latest moves by Khan, a former cricket star turned conservative Islamist leader who came to power in 2018, contending they are a ploy by Khan to stay in power.

The Supreme Court started hearing arguments on Monday both from Khan's legal team and his allies, and also the opposition, but then adjourned the session until noon Tuesday.

There was no immediate explanation for the adjournment and it was also unclear when a ruling would come. Muslim-majority Pakistan is observing the holy month of Ramadan, when the faithful fast from dawn to dusk.

On Sunday, Khan's ally and Pakistan's deputy parliament speaker, Qasim Suri, dissolved the assembly to sidestep a no-confidence vote that Khan appeared certain to lose. The opposition claims the deputy speaker had no constitutional authority to throw out the no-confidence vote.

The developments marked the latest in an escalating dispute between Khan and the opposition, which has been backed by defectors from the prime minister's own party, Tehreek-e-Insaf or Justice Party, and a former coalition partner, the Muttahida Quami Movement, which had joined opposition ranks. The opposition claims it had the numbers to oust Khan in parliament. It has also accused him of economic mismanagement.

The current political conundrum is in many ways uncharted territory, even for Pakistan, where successive governments have been overthrown by a powerful military and others ousted before their term ended.

The most significant decision before the Supreme Court is whether Suri, the deputy speaker, had the constitutional authority to throw out the no-confidence vote, according to constitutional lawyer Ali Zafar.

Zafar told The Associated Press that the court also has to decide whether it even has the authority to rule on this matter. Khan's party insists actions of a parliament speaker are privileged and cannot be challenged in court.

If the court rules the deputy speaker was out of line, the parliament will reconvene and hold the no-confidence vote on Khan, legal experts say. If the court upholds the latest actions, Pakistan is heading into early elections.

The opposition says it has the 172 votes in the 342-seat assembly to oust Khan. After Suri on Sunday threw out the no-confidence motion, information minister and another Khan ally, Fawad Chaudhry, accused the opposition of plotting "regime change" with the backing of the United States.

Pakistan's powerful military — which has directly ruled the country for more than half of its 75-year history — has remained silent through much of the political infighting.

However Army Chief Qamar Javed Bajwa on Sunday distanced the military from allegations of a U.S.-backed conspiracy, saying Pakistan wants good relations with both China and the U.S., Pakistan's largest trading partner.

Khan, an outspoken critic of Washington's war on terror and Pakistan's partnership in that war, claims the U.S. wants him gone because of his foreign policy choices and for refusing to distance Pakistan from China and Russia.

However, Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the Wilson Center, sees the latest political wrangling as just another “part of a recurring pattern in Pakistan of governments undermining the democratic process to maintain their hold on power.”

It underscores a deeply polarized society, Kugelman added. While Khan’s supporters may think dissolving parliament was a “stroke of genius” to avoid a no confidence vote, his critics “think he has acted recklessly and essentially pulled off a legal coup, plunging the country into a constitutional crisis.”

Separately, Pakistani President Arif Alvi, another Khan ally, was ignoring Monday’s deliberations before the Supreme Court and was forging ahead with preparations for an interim government that would see Pakistan through elections. Under the constitution, Khan would remain prime minister until the appointment of a caretaker premier, Alvi said in a tweet.

Late frost ices over French vineyards, threatens fruit crops

By THIBAUT CAMUS Associated Press

CHABLIS, France (AP) — French vintners are lighting candles to thaw their grapevines to save them from a late frost following a winter warm spell, a temperature swing that is threatening fruit crops in multiple countries.

Ice-coated vines stretched across hillsides around Chablis as the Burgundy region woke Monday to temperatures of minus 5 C (23 F). Fruit growers are worried that the frost will kill off large numbers of early buds, which appeared in March as temperatures rose above 20 C (68 F), and disrupt the whole growing season.

The frost is particularly frustrating after a similar phenomenon hit French vineyards last year, leading to some 2 billion euros (\$2.4 billion) in losses. Scientists later found that the damaging 2021 frost was made more likely by climate change.

Before dawn Monday, row upon row of candles flickered beneath the frosty vines in Chablis. As the sun rose, it illuminated the ice crystals gripping the vines.

Some vintners tried to warm the vines with electrical lines, or sprayed the buds with water to protect them from frost. The water creates a thin layer of ice that ensures the blossom’s temperature remains around freezing point but does not dip much lower.

Chablis vintner Daniel Defaix, whose vineyard has been producing wine for 400 years and lived through a multitude of climate disasters, calls what’s happening now “a very, very serious frost.”

He noted temperatures are dropping a few degrees lower than last year, down to minus 7 C in places, and have reached warmer hilltop plots as well as those in the cooler valleys.

He placed paraffin candles on the soil or set up special irrigation systems to protect about five hectares of his most valuable grand cru and premier cru grapes, but had to leave the remaining 25 hectares to face the forces of nature.

At a cost of 10 euros per candle — and 600 candles per hectare — it was too costly to invest in saving the rest of the grapes.

“After that, you have to cross your fingers and pray to God,” he told The Associated Press.

In neighboring Switzerland, fruit growers scrambled Sunday to protect their crops, rolling out heaters and pellet stoves at night and around dawn, or turning on overhead irrigation systems, said Beatrice Ruettimann, a spokeswoman for Swiss Fruit, a union of fruit producers. Some unfurled plastic sheeting to shield their trees.

Temperatures fell below freezing in most fruit-growing regions in Switzerland, she said. Northwestern Switzerland bore the brunt of the cold snap, which was most critical for stone fruit — like cherries, apricots and plums — because they’re in bloom and “therefore in a delicate stage,” she said. A few early varieties of apple including Gravensteiner and Williams were also affected.

In the Betuwe fruit-growing region of the Netherlands, farmers sprayed their trees with water Saturday night and into the early hours of Sunday morning to ensure a layer of ice protected fragile blossoms from the sub-zero temperatures.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 23 of 69

Last year's April frost led to what French government officials described as "probably the greatest agricultural catastrophe of the beginning of the 21st century." The pattern was similar: an intense April 6-8 frost after a lengthy warm period in March.

Researchers with the group World Weather Attribution studied the effect of the 2021 frost on the vineyard-rich Champagne, Loire Valley and Burgundy regions of France, and found the March warmth made it particularly damaging.

The researchers concluded that the warming caused by man-made emissions had coaxed the plants into exposing their young leaves early, before a blast of Arctic cold reached Europe in April.

The cold weather was not bad news for all, however. In the central Dutch town of Winterswijk, skaters took to the ice Sunday at the local ice skating club. "This is unique: Skating on natural ice in April," the club's "ice master," Hendrik ten Prooije, told local network Omroep Gelderland.

Russia faces growing outrage amid new evidence of atrocities

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and NEBI QENA Associated Press

BUCHA, Ukraine (AP) — Russia faced a fresh wave of condemnation on Monday after evidence emerged of what appeared to be deliberate killings of civilians in Ukraine. Some Western leaders called for further sanctions in response, even as Moscow continued to press its offensive in the country's east.

Germany's defense minister suggested the European Union discuss a ban on Russian gas imports, but more senior officials indicated an immediate boycott was not possible — a sign that leaders could struggle in the short-term to ramp up already severe sanctions on Russia.

Ukrainian officials said the bodies of 410 civilians were found in towns around the capital, Kyiv, that were recaptured from Russian forces in recent days. In Bucha, northwest of the capital, Associated Press journalists saw 21 bodies. One group of nine, all in civilian clothes, were scattered around a site that residents said Russian troops used as a base. They appeared to have been shot at close range. At least two had their hands tied behind their backs.

In Motyzhyn, to the west of Kyiv, AP journalists saw the bodies of four people who appeared to have been shot at close range and thrown into a pit. Residents said the mayor, her son, and her husband — who had been bound and blindfolded — were among them.

The images of battered corpses lying in the streets or hastily dug graves unleashed a wave of outrage that could signal a turning point in the nearly 6-week-old war. But sanctions have thus far failed to halt the offensive, and rising energy prices along with tight controls on the Russian currency market have blunted their impact, with the ruble rebounding strongly after initially crashing.

Western and Ukrainian leaders have accused Russia of war crimes before, and the International Criminal Court's prosecutor has opened a probe to investigate the conflict. But the latest reports ratcheted up the condemnation even further, with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and some Western leaders going so far as to accuse Russia of genocide.

In a video shown during the Grammy Awards in Las Vegas for musicians and other artists, Zelenskyy implored them to support his nation and "fill the silence with your music."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov rejected the allegations, describing the scenes outside Kyiv as a "stage-managed anti-Russian provocation." He said the mayor of Bucha made no mention of atrocities a day after Russian troops left last week, but two days later scores of bodies were photographed scattered in the streets.

He said Russia is pushing for an urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss the matter, but the U.K., which currently chairs the body, has refused to convene it. The United States and Britain have accused Russia in recent weeks of using Security Council meetings to spread disinformation.

European leaders, meanwhile, left no doubt about who they thought was behind the killings.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said "the Russian authorities are responsible for these atrocities, committed while they had effective control of the area."

"The perpetrators of war crimes and other serious violations as well as the responsible government of-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 24 of 69

officials and military leaders will be held accountable," he added.

French President Emmanuel Macron said Monday that there is "clear evidence of war crimes" in Bucha that demand new measures. "I'm in favor of a new round of sanctions and in particular on coal and petrol. We need to act," he said on France-Inter radio.

Poland's Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki described Russia as a "totalitarian-fascist state," saying "the bloody massacres perpetrated by Russian soldiers deserve to be called by name: This is genocide." Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez also used the word "genocide," saying those responsible should answer for their crimes.

The crime of genocide is difficult to prove, as prosecutors would have to show that the killers or their commanders had a "specific intent" to partially or wholly destroy a group of people.

In the meantime, the U.S. and its allies have sought to punish Russia for the invasion by imposing sweeping economic sanctions. But they may be reluctant to impose measures that cause further harm to a global economy still recovering from the coronavirus pandemic. As a major oil and gas exporter, Russia stands to benefit from any rise in already high global energy prices.

Europe is in a particular bind, since it gets 40% of its gas and 25% of its oil from Russia. Governments have been scrambling to find ways to reduce that reliance without causing a substantial loss of economic output.

German Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck, who is also the economy minister and responsible for energy, said Europe can go "significantly further" in imposing sanctions against Russia. But he said Germany is right to take a longer-term approach to abandoning Russian energy imports.

Germany has faced criticism for opposing an immediate halt to Russian energy deliveries. The country says it hopes to end Russian coal imports this summer and oil imports by the end of the year, but halting gas will take longer.

"We are working every day on creating the conditions for and steps toward an embargo," Habeck said. "We are on the right track."

Wolfgang Buechner, a German government spokesman, meanwhile said Putin and his supporters "will feel the consequences," of additional measures to be approved in the coming days, without elaborating.

Asked on ARD television Sunday evening whether there should be a halt to gas deliveries, German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht replied that "exactly that" should be discussed by EU ministers.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's Feb. 24 invasion has killed thousands of people and forced more than 4 million Ukrainians to flee their country. Putin has said the attack is aimed at eliminating a security threat and demanded that Ukraine drop its bid to join the NATO military alliance of Western countries. Ukraine insists it never posed any threat but has offered to officially declare itself neutral.

The head of Ukraine's delegation in talks with Russia has said Moscow's negotiators informally agreed to most of a draft proposal discussed during talks in Istanbul, but no written confirmation has been provided.

While Western officials initially said they believed Putin's goal was to take Kyiv and potentially install a Kremlin-friendly government, Russian forces faced stiff resistance outside the capital and on other fronts, and have now retreated from some areas. Moscow says it is currently focusing its offensive on the Donbas in the country's east, where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting Ukrainian forces for years.

Britain's Defense Ministry said Monday that Russia continued to flood soldiers and mercenaries from the Wagner private military group into the Donbas. It said Russian troops are still trying to take the region's strategic port city of Mariupol, which has seen weeks of heavy fighting and some of the worst suffering of the war.

"Mariupol is almost certainly a key objective of the Russian invasion," the ministry said, "as it will secure a land corridor from Russia to the occupied territory of Crimea," in the south, which Moscow annexed in 2014.

On Monday, the Ukrainian military said its forces had retaken some towns in the northern Chernihiv region and humanitarian aid was being delivered.

Jurors to weigh conspiracy charges in alleged Whitmer plot

By ED WHITE Associated Press

A jury in Michigan will begin its deliberations Monday in the trial of four men accused of designing a plan to kidnap Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

The jury picked a leader late Friday afternoon, following hours of closing arguments from lawyers, then said it would start discussing the case after the weekend.

Adam Fox, Barry Croft Jr., Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta can be found guilty of conspiracy, even if it wasn't possible to pull off the kidnapping in fall 2020, U.S. District Judge Robert Jonker said during jury instructions.

A key factor, if the jury finds it, would be a "mutual understanding either spoken or unspoken" between two or more people in the group, the judge said.

Fox, Croft and Harris also face charges related to weapons.

"Deciding what the facts are is your job, not mine," Jonker told the jury.

Prosecutors said the plot was simmering for months, leavened by anti-government extremism and anger over Whitmer's COVID-19 restrictions. With undercover FBI agents and informants embedded in the group, the men trained with a crudely built "shoot house" to replicate her vacation home, prosecutors allege.

There is no dispute that the alleged leaders, Fox and Croft, traveled to Elk Rapids, Michigan, to scout the governor's property and a nearby bridge that same weekend in September 2020.

Ty Garbin and Kaleb Franks, who pleaded guilty and testified against the four men, were on the same road trip, along with covert investigators.

Garbin said the goal was to get Whitmer before the fall election and create enough chaos to create a civil war and stop Joe Biden from winning the presidency. Much of the government's case came from secretly recorded conversations, group messages and social media posts.

"You heard them in their own voices over and over again," Assistant U.S. Attorney Nils Kessler told jurors, "talking about kidnapping her, murdering her, blowing up bridges and people and anybody who could get in their way. And it wasn't just talk."

The men were arrested in October 2020.

Defense lawyers, especially those representing Fox and Croft, attacked the government's investigation and the use of a crucial informant, Dan Chappel. They claimed Chappel was the real leader, taking direction from the FBI and keeping the group on edge while recording them for months.

"Dan Chappel makes everything happen," attorney Christopher Gibbons said in his closing remarks.

Attorney Joshua Blanchard repeatedly called the scheme "smoke and mirrors."

"There was no plan. There was no agreement," he said.

Croft is from Bear, Delaware, while the others are from Michigan.

Whitmer, a Democrat, rarely talks publicly about the plot, though she referred to "surprises" during her term that seemed like "something out of fiction" when she filed for reelection on March 17.

She has blamed former President Donald Trump for fomenting anger over coronavirus restrictions and refusing to condemn right-wing extremists like those charged in the case.

Hungary's Orban popular at home, isolated abroad after win

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — As Hungary's nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban prepares to continue his autocratic governance of Hungary for another four years, he faces a shattered opposition at home but an increasingly isolated position abroad, where his flouting of democratic standards and approach to the war in Ukraine has riled the European Union and other nations.

On Sunday, as officials from his right-wing Fidesz party gathered at an election night event on the Danube river in Budapest, Orban told supporters that their landslide victory in the country's national election was a message to Europe that his model of "illiberal democracy" was a prophecy for the continent's future.

"The whole world has seen tonight in Budapest that Christian democratic politics, conservative civic

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 26 of 69

politics and patriotic politics have won. We are telling Europe that this is not the past, this is the future, our common European future," Orban said.

But while Orban's party won 53% of the vote in Hungary, convincing Europe to get on board won't be so easy. Orban already faces heavy pressure in the EU to change tack on his approach to corruption, minority rights and media freedom, and as war rages in neighboring Ukraine, his ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin have alienated even some of his closest allies.

During Hungary's election campaign, a Western-looking coalition of opposition parties challenging Orban called for Hungary to support its embattled neighbor and act in lockstep with its EU and NATO partners.

Yet Orban, considered to be Putin's closest ally in the EU, insisted that Hungary remain neutral and maintain its close economic ties with Moscow, including continuing to import Russian gas and oil on favorable terms.

The president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, on Saturday 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.

Yet while speaking to supporters on Sunday, Orban singled out Zelenskyy as part of the "overwhelming force" that he said his party had struggled against in the election — "the left at home, the international left, the Brussels bureaucrats, the Soros empire with all its money, the international mainstream media, and in the end, even the Ukrainian president."

Orban's antagonistic approach to Zelenskyy and conspicuous caution around damaging relations with Russia, even as Moscow is accused of committing war crimes in Ukraine, has led to fault lines appearing among his European friends.

Poland, also governed by a right-wing populist government, is Hungary's most loyal partner in the EU. But speaking to Polish public radio in the week before Hungary's vote, ruling party leader and Orban ally Jaroslaw Kaczynski said he was displeased with Orban's stance on Russia.

"We will see what will happen after the elections and then this assessment can be finally formulated. But we are not happy," Kaczynski said.

Hungary's vote had been expected to be the closest since Orban took power in 2010, thanks to the country's six main opposition parties putting aside their ideological differences to form a united front against Fidesz.

But with 99% of votes counted in the election for the country's 199-seat parliament, Fidesz held 53% of the vote while the opposition coalition, steeply underperforming expectations, had 35%.

Edit Zgut, a political scientist at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, predicted that the clear victory for Orban would allow him to move further in an autocratic direction, sidelining dissidents and capturing new areas of the economy.

"Hungary seems to have reached a point of no return," she said. "The key lesson is that the playing field is tilted so much that it became almost impossible to replace Fidesz in elections."

Orban — a fierce critic of immigration, LGBTQ rights and "EU bureaucrats" — has garnered the admiration of right-wing nationalists across Europe and North America.

Along with the parliamentary election, a referendum on LGBTQ issues was held on Sunday with questions pertaining to sex education programs in schools and the availability to children of information about sex reassignment. Participation failed to reach the 50% threshold to make it legally binding, with 20% of voters spoiling their ballots, part of an opposition initiative to sabotage the referendum which it decried as homophobic. Of the 44% of voters who cast valid votes, more than 92% voted with the government's position

In a surprise performance, radical right-wing party Our Homeland Movement appeared to have garnered more than 6% of the vote, exceeding the 5% threshold needed to gain seats in parliament.

Opposition parties and international observers have noted structural impediments to defeating Orban, highlighting pervasive pro-government bias in the public media, the domination of commercial news out-

lets by Orban allies and a heavily gerrymandered electoral map.

Speaking to supporters in Budapest late Sunday, opposition leader Peter Marki-Zay conceded defeat but argued that Fidesz had won under a system of its own making.

"We knew in advance that it would be an extremely unequal fight," Marki-Zay said. "We do not dispute that Fidesz won this election. That this election was democratic and free is, of course, something we continue to dispute."

China sends in military to help with Shanghai virus outbreak

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China has sent more than 10,000 health workers from around the country to Shanghai, including 2,000 from the military, as it struggles to stamp out a rapidly spreading outbreak in its largest city under its zero-COVID strategy.

Shanghai was conducting a mass testing of its 25 million residents Monday as what was announced as a two-phase lockdown entered its second week. Most of eastern Shanghai, which was supposed to re-open last Friday, remained locked down along with the western half of the city.

While many factories and financial companies have been allowed to keep operating if they isolate their employees, concern was growing about the potential economic impact of an extended lockdown in China's financial capital, a major shipping and manufacturing center.

The highly contagious omicron BA.2 form of the virus is testing China's ability to maintain its zero-COVID approach, which aims to stop outbreaks from spreading by isolating everyone who tests positive, whether they have symptoms or not. Shanghai has converted an exhibition hall and other facilities into massive isolation centers where people with mild or no symptoms are housed in a sea of beds separated by temporary partitions.

China on Monday reported more than 13,000 new cases nationwide in the previous 24 hours, of which nearly 12,000 were asymptomatic. About 9,000 of the cases were in Shanghai. The other large outbreak is in northeastern China's Jilin province, where new cases topped 3,500.

The Shanghai lockdown has sparked numerous complaints, from food shortages to limited staff and facilities at hastily constructed isolation sites. Some people who tested positive have remained at home for extended periods because of a shortage of isolation beds or transportation to take them to a center, the business news publication Caixin said.

Asked about the anxiety of parents separated from their children, Shanghai health commission official Wu Qianyu said Monday that they are required to be kept apart if the child tests positive and the parent tests negative, according to the Paper, an online news outlet.

If both test positive, the parent is allowed to stay with the child at an isolation site for children and receive any treatment there, Wu was quoted as saying at a news conference on Monday.

The China Daily newspaper said nearly 15,000 medical workers from neighboring Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces left for Shanghai early Monday from their hospitals by bus. More than 2,000 personnel from the army, navy and a joint logistics support force arrived on Sunday, a Chinese military newspaper said.

At least four other provinces have also dispatched doctors, nurses and other medical workers to Shanghai, the state-owned China Daily said.

Workers wearing blue protective clothing held up signs saying "Keep one meter distance" and "Do not crowd" as people lined up for testing in one part of western Shanghai. The testing was being done in batches, 10 people at a time. If the sample comes back positive, all 10 are tested individually.

While most shops and other businesses in Shanghai are shut down, major manufacturers including automakers General Motors Co. and Volkswagen AG say their factories are still operating. VW has reduced production because of a disruption in supplies of parts.

Businesses that are operating are enforcing "closed loop" strategies that isolate employees. Thousands of stock traders and other people in financial industries are sleeping in their offices, according to the Daily Economic News newspaper.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 28 of 69

Three out of five foreign companies with operations in Shanghai say they have cut this year's sales forecasts, according to a survey conducted last week by the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai and the American Chamber of Commerce in China. One-third of the 120 companies that responded to the survey said they have delayed investments.

Shanghai has set up temporary vegetable warehouses to boost supplies, and an online grocery delivery service has doubled the staff at one of its warehouses to try to keep up with demand, the official Xinhua News Agency said. City officials have apologized for the government's handling of the lockdown.

Hong Kong leader Lam won't seek new term after rocky 5 years

By ZEN SOO and VINCENT YU Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said Monday she wouldn't seek a second term after a rocky five years marked by huge protests calling for her resignation, a security crackdown that has quashed dissent and most recently a COVID-19 wave that overwhelmed the health system.

Her successor will be picked in May and the city's security chief during the 2019 protests is among the possible choices.

"I will complete my five-year term as chief executive on the 30th of June this year, and I will also call an end to my 42 years of public service," Lam said at a news conference. She thanks her team of local officials and the central authorities in Beijing, and said she plans to spend more time with family, which is her "sole consideration."

Speculation had swirled for months about whether she would seek another term, but she said that her decision had been conveyed to the central government in Beijing last year and was met with "respect and understanding."

"Less than two years into my chief executive term, because of the anti-extradition bill and because of interference from foreign forces and also the attack of COVID-19, I was under great pressure," Lam said. "However the motivation for me to press on was the very staunch support behind me by the central authorities."

She presided over a period in which Beijing firmly established control over the former British colony that was returned to China in 1997. For years, the city rocked back and forth between calls for more freedom and growing signs of China extending its reach into the city, even after Hong Kong was promised 50 years of freedom to govern itself semi-autonomously from the mainland.

Lam's popularity sharply declined over her five-year term, particularly over legislation that would have allowed crime suspects to be extradited to mainland China for trial and later over her leadership during the 2019 protests. The mass demonstrations were marked at times by violent clashes between police and protesters. Authorities insisted foreign interference was fueling the movement, rather than organic local activism, while protesters denounced police actions as excessive and said the violence and seditious claims were attempts to undermine the pro-democracy cause.

She also strongly supported the national security law initiated by Beijing and implemented by her government that was seen as eroding the "one country, two systems" framework that promised after the handover from Britain that city residents would retain freedoms not found in mainland China, such as a free press and freedom of expression.

The security law and other police and court actions in the years since have virtually erased the city's pro-democracy movement, with activists and the movement's supporters either arrested or jailed. Others have fled into exile.

Hong Kong media say the city's No. 2 leader John Lee is likely to enter the race to succeed Lam. Chief Secretary Lee was the city's head of security during the 2019 protests and is known for his support for the police force during the protests and his tough stance against protesters.

Hong Kong's leader is elected by a committee made up of lawmakers, representatives of various industries and professions, and pro-Beijing representatives such as Hong Kong deputies to the China's legislature. One of the unfulfilled demands of the 2019 protests was direct election of the city's chief executive.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 29 of 69

The election for the chief executive had been set on March 27 but was postponed until May 8 as the city endures its worst coronavirus outbreak of the pandemic.

Lam said that holding the polls as originally scheduled would pose "public health risks" even if a committee of only 1,462 people is involved.

Hong Kong has reported nearly 1.2 million cases, 99% of the during the fifth wave driven by the highly transmissible omicron variant. It has strained the healthcare system, with hospitals at times placing patients on beds outdoors. Nearly 8,000 people have died in the latest outbreak, and mortuaries operating at capacity have used refrigerated containers to temporarily store bodies.

Lam's government has been widely criticized for flip-flopping policies, including mixed messaging in February and March on whether a lockdown and compulsory mass-testing would be implemented. The uncertainty sparked panic among residents, who cleared out store shelves to hoard daily necessities.

The plans for compulsory mass-testing were dropped, and Lam last week urged all residents to test themselves with rapid antigen kits between April 8 to 10. She later said the exercise was voluntary as it was not possible to enforce.

Lam, 64, previously served as chief secretary and secretary for development and in other civil service positions. She earned the nickname "good fighter" for her tough stance and refusal to back down in political battles.

Lam renounced her British nationality in 2007 when she was appointed secretary for development. Her husband and two children have retained their British nationalities.

Batiste, joyful performances highlight Grammy Awards

By DAVID BAUDER AP Entertainment Writer

Jon Batiste had the most Grammy Award nominations and his five wins outpaced everyone, yet he somehow seemed the biggest surprise on a joyous night for music that washed away some of the bad taste left by the Oscars a week earlier.

Batiste's "We Are" won the prestigious album of the year award Sunday over music heavyweights like Tony Bennett, Billie Eilish, Taylor Swift and Ye, who changed his name from Kanye West. Batiste ended his dance-filled performance of "Freedom" during the show by jumping on Eilish's table.

Silk Sonic won four Grammys, including song and record of the year for the duo's smooth soul hit, "Leave the Door Open." Olivia Rodrigo's three awards included best new artist. Foo Fighters, Chris Stapleton and CeCe Winans also won three each.

Yet Batiste captured the mood of a night where, despite some somber moments, the live performance skills of music's best artists were on full display after COVID-19 had put much of the concert industry on pause.

"I was having such a good time," Batiste said backstage after the show, describing the moment when Lenny Kravitz announced his best album victory. "I was hanging with my family, when my name came and the 'We Are' title was said by Lenny — such a full circle moment because we played together when I was 16. It was surreal."

The versatile Batiste, music director on Stephen Colbert's "Late Show," also won Sunday for his song "Cry," the video for "Freedom" and his work with Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross on the soundtrack for "Soul."

Kravitz had performed "Are You Gonna Go My Way" in a duet with H.E.R., his guitar skills and wardrobe unchanged since the song came out in 1993.

H.E.R. was still on a high backstage when she relived the moment.

"I watched Lenny growing up," she said. "I literally studied all his videos of his performances. He's one of the reasons why I wanted to play guitar."

While sometimes-awkward performance partnerships have become a Grammy Award signature, Sunday's show featured mostly sparkling performances by artists on their own. BTS high-stepped their way through "Butter," rapper Nas fronted a big band, Rodrigo and Eilish powerfully channeled youthful angst,

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 30 of 69

Stapleton delivered a bluesy version of "Cold" and Brandi Carlile, introduced by the formidable duo of Joni Mitchell and Bonnie Raitt, lived up to the challenge.

"I think we're all having a great time," host Trevor Noah said.

The show was a clear contrast to the bad vibes from the Oscars a week earlier, which will forever be remembered for Will Smith smacking comedian Chris Rock after taking offense at one of his jokes.

There were a few quick references to that moment at the Grammys. Noah said that "we'll be keeping names out people's mouths," a reference to Smith's profane order to Rock not to talk about Smith's wife. Questlove, onstage Sunday to present an award, said he trusted that people will keep their distance from him. The maker of the "Summer of Soul" film, which won a Grammy Sunday, received an Oscar last week moments after the Slap.

In a more ham-fisted exchange during the untelevised portion of the Grammys, actor LeVar Burton told the audience to "remain in your seat and keep your hands to yourself" in introducing comic Nate Bargatze, who came onstage wearing a helmet.

The Academy Awards had also decided against giving time on its show to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week, even as some actors had advocated for it. The Grammys on Sunday played a special message from the wartime leader, who soberly reminded the audience that "our musicians wear body armor instead of tuxedos."

His taped message was followed by a John Legend performance of "Free," with accompaniment from three Ukrainian artists — a musician, singer and poet.

The Grammys also paid tribute to Foo Fighters drummer Taylor Hawkins, who died a week ago while on tour. The band had been booked to play the Grammys. Eilish wore a shirt with Hawkins' face as she performed her Grammy-nominated song, "Happier Than Ever."

The Foo Fighters won Grammys for best rock performance, song and album — the latter for a record-setting fifth time in the category.

Bruno Mars made history as half of Silk Sonic with Anderson .Paak. He tied Paul Simon as the only artist to win record of the year three times. Mars won with his own "24K Magic" in 2018 and in duet with Mark Ronson on "Uptown Funk" in 2016.

The victory for "Leave the Door Open" in song and record of the year was a mild upset in a year where Rodrigo's "Drivers License" was ubiquitous and Eilish was bidding for her third straight record of the year following "bad guy" and "Everything I Wanted."

.Paak was giddy following Silk Sonic's fourth award of the night, telling the Las Vegas audience that drinks were on him.

"We are really trying our hardest to remain humble at this point," .Paak said. "But in the industry, we call that a clean sweep."

Bennett won in the traditional pop vocal album category for a staggering 14th time, this year with duet partner Lady Gaga. Now 95 and retired from performing because of Alzheimer's disease, he introduced a Gaga performance via taped message.

The Grammys paid tribute to behind-the-scenes concert tour employees who had been largely out of work during the pandemic, inviting four of them on to introduce performances by Eilish, Stapleton, H.E.R. and Carrie Underwood. The show also spotlighted artists in more specialized categories like gospel and bluegrass by having them perform before commercial breaks from the roof of the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas. It was the first time the Grammys, which had been delayed due to rising COVID-19 cases, was held outside Los Angeles or New York.

The location change allowed rap artist Baby Keem to enjoy a hometown Grammy in best rap performance for his collaboration, "Family Ties," with cousin Kendrick Lamar.

"This is a dream," he said.

Rodrigo, who starred in the "High School Musical" television series, thanked her parents for letting her follow dreams that briefly included being an Olympic gymnast. Alongside song, record and album of the year, best new artist is considered among the Grammys' four most prestigious awards.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 31 of 69

After some pre-show handwringing that included cancelling a planned performance by Ye due to some of his concerning online behavior. Ye wasn't on hand to pick up either of the two Grammys he shared in on Sunday.

Mitchell won a best historical album Grammy for a project tracing her early work, while late Beatle George Harrison was honored for the 50th anniversary box of "All Things Must Pass."

Louis C.K. won an award for best comedy album, five years after several women accused him of sexual misconduct.

Ukrainian refugees find jobs, kindness, as they settle in

By MONIKA SCISLOWSKA and STEPHEN McGRATH Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Nataliya Hibska quickly brushes her teeth and makes the bed. She is rushing to her new job.

From a small hostel room in eastern Warsaw, Hibska, a Ukrainian refugee, is slowly rebuilding her life, which was abruptly upended by Russia's invasion of her homeland.

European Union member nations like Poland and Romania — the two neighboring countries to have received the most refugees from Ukraine — have launched programs to help them integrate.

The 47-year-old former manager of a private education center from Kharkiv, in eastern Ukraine, Hibska fled her hometown after a second wave of shelling. When bombs struck a nearby military warehouse, rattling her home, she knew it was time to leave and seek refuge for herself and her 11-year-old son.

"We were afraid to go out, to let them go out into the yard, we were afraid to let them ride bicycles or play football. We were just so scared and we decided that that was enough. It was time to flee," she said, describing the decision she and many of her neighbors were forced to take.

With only some basic belongings they embarked on what became a challenging five-day journey to the safety of Poland.

Three weeks on, and by a combination of help extended by ordinary people in Poland and policies put in place at the national and municipal level, Hibska and her son are starting to feel safe.

They have a simple yet welcoming home. Her son is enrolled at a local school, and she has started a new job as cook at a Ukrainian food bar launched specially to provide employment to refugees.

The workday starts early with food preparation ahead of the lunchtime rush.

Hibska and the five other Ukrainian women working here, all recently arrived refugees, roll out dough and chop fillings for traditional Ukrainian dumplings, pelmeni, that are a staple.

"I used to have five people working for me and I organized (youth) camps," she said, reflecting on her past life in Kharkiv. "I am not embarrassed by the fact that currently I am working in a kitchen."

Warsaw city authorities say work helps refugees integrate but is also filling vacancies in the health sector and in education, where special classes are being launched to assist newly arrived Ukrainian children.

Of the more than 4 million refugees that have fled Ukraine, over 2.4 million have crossed into Poland. While many have traveled onward throughout Europe, plenty have stayed in Poland which is offering free temporary accommodation, medical care, education and some social benefits. Some 625,000 refugees have sought and obtained Polish ID numbers entitling them to all that for 18 months.

But living off benefits was not something Nataliya would accept for too long.

"Volunteers help us with everything. We can live off Poland, but I don't see that as a good thing," she said. "I need to work. You won't get much doing nothing."

Her new job helps provide for her and her son, Roman, and anything left over she hopes to send to her parents and husband, still living in Kharkiv.

Her good fortune in Poland was thanks to a free hostel run by a family of developers and hotel owners. The same company launched a Ukrainian food bar specifically to provide jobs to refugees.

The place opened 10 days ago and is quickly gaining in fame, with customers intent on helping Ukrainians all the while enjoying a good meal.

"The forms of help are evolving" said Karolina Samulowska awaiting her order. "At fist there was aid,

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 32 of 69

sandwiches, railway stations.”

Now, at the bar “on the one hand the products are here and promote the country, on the other hand the money moves on, giving meaning to the refugees’ lives.”

As a regular flow of customers comes by to pick up lunch, the restaurant’s manager, Dorota Wereszczynska, reflects on the success.

“We were not expecting such popularity,” she said. “Our motto is “You buy. You eat. You help.”

Further south on Europe’s map, Romania has taken in more than 600,000 refugees from Ukraine.

Flavia Boghiu, the deputy mayor of the central city of Brasov, says the key to integration is to help people be “as autonomous as possible.”

The city’s refugee centers offer support and information on work offers, kindergartens and other activities, she told the AP, and local authorities proudly boast that of 1,200 refugees who arrived in the city, more than 75% want to stay.

The employment process is “much slower than normal, because most of them don’t have paperwork with them. ... Also you need to discuss with them to understand their particular situation. If you have a mother with three children you need to see what you’re going to do with the children (while) she’s at work,” Boghiu said.

Four generations of Anastasia Yevdokimova’s family fled from their homes near the Black Sea. The 21-year-old beauty industry worker came to Brasov with her grandmother, her mother and her 3-year-old son. Brasov drew them with its impressive architecture and access to nature “which helps to distract from the circumstances,” Yevdokimova said.

They’ve already had to seek urgent medical care for the child and found it to be quick and attentive. That reassured them.

Another refugee, 27-year-old Karina Buiukli, a human resources manager from the Black Sea port city of Odesa, and her family have been offered free accommodation with a Brasov couple, but were not expecting the great kindness they have met with.

“Our hosts, the owners of this apartment, are so kind and now we’re just like friends,” Buiukli said. “They showed us the town, they asked us to their house, it seems like we’ve know each other for a long (time).”

Jon Batiste tops Grammys; Silk Sonic soars, Rodrigo crowned

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Olivia Rodrigo made an impressive Grammy debut, Silk Sonic claimed two major awards and Jon Batiste had the most stunning victory of the night winning the top prize at Sunday’s Grammy Awards.

Batiste won five Grammys Sunday including album of the year for “We Are” pulling off an upset in a loaded category filled with tough competition from Rodrigo, Billie Eilish, Taylor Swift and the combined talents of Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga. After his win, the multi-genre performer honored the artists he beat, telling the audience that “the creative arts are subjective. Be you.”

“I just put my head down and I work on the craft every day,” said Batiste, who won for his song “Cry,” the video for “Freedom” and his work with the Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross on the soundtrack for “Soul.”

Silk Sonic — the all-star union of Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak — took home awards in all four categories it was nominated in, including record and song of the year. Both were exuberant as they accepted the honor toward the end of the ceremony.

The wins in both major categories put Mars on the brink of history: He became the only artist along with Paul Simon to take win record of the year three times. He tied the record for most song of the year wins with two.

“We are really trying our hardest to remain humble at this point,” .Paak said. “But in the industry, they call that a clean sweep!” later adding “drinks is on Silk Sonic tonight!”

Rodrigo’s win for best new artist put her in esteemed company including Carly Simon, Crosby, Stills & Nash, Tom Jones, the Beatles and Billie Eilish.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 33 of 69

A veteran of the "High School Musical" series, she became the breakout music star of 2021, leading with her massive viral hit "Drivers License" and following with the single "Good 4 U" and the aching album "Sour," which took best pop vocal album.

"This is my biggest dream come true," she said after her best new artist win. She thanked her parents for supporting her dreams, which at one point involved being an Olympic gymnast and quickly veered toward music.

"I want to thank my mom for being so supportive for all of my dreams, no matter how crazy. I want to thank my mom and dad for being equally as proud of me for winning a Grammy as they were when I learned how to do a back walk."

The win came after the night's festivities briefly grew somber when Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the gathering with an update on the war and numbers including children injured and killed. "Our musicians wear body armor instead of tuxedos," he said. "We are fighting Russia, which brings horrible silence with its bombs. The dead silence. Fill the silence with your music."

He ended by saying: "Tell the truth about the war on your social networks, on TV. Support us in any way you can, but not silence. And then peace will come to all our cities."

John Legend then performed "Free" with Ukrainian exiles including singer-actress Mika Newton and poet Lyuba Yakimchuk.

Silk Sonic opened the ceremony in Las Vegas with their high-energy, infectious mix of retro soul and funk by performing their "777." They returned to the stage a short time later to collect the song of the year trophy for "Leave the Door Open."

Both Mars and .Paak jumped out their seat, threw up their hands and danced to their song.

"We'll be singing this song together for the rest of our lives," Mars said to .Paak

Host Trevor Noah introduced the duo's opening performance by saying they were singlehandedly bringing back the 1970s, "which might explain the inflation."

Doja Cat and SZA gave an emotional speech after winning best pop duo-group performance for "Kiss Me More." Cat told SZA that she's "everything to me" and the "epitome of talent" as she tried to hold back tears.

"This is a big deal," Cat said after she darted to the podium after using the bathroom. SZA beat her by a few seconds despite climbing onstage on crutches with the help of Lady Gaga.

"I feel like me and SZA are similar in the way that we both grew up with spiritual backgrounds," she continued. "But she was perfect for this song."

It was a family affair from cousins Baby Keem and Kendrick Lamar, who won best rap performance for their song "Family Ties." Lamar won his 14th Grammy and the first for Keem, who said "nothing could have prepared me for this moment" after stepping out onstage to claim his trophy.

By the time the show started on CBS, Batiste had already taken home four Grammy Awards, including his first ever, during a pre-telecast ceremony.

"I am so grateful for the gifts that God has given me and the ability to share that for the love of humankind," Batiste said after collecting his music video award for "Freedom." "We just wanted everyone to see it. Any depression, any bondage or any darkness that was over your life is completely removed by just the love and the joy of the video."

Chris Stapleton won his third Grammy for best country solo performance for "You Should Probably Leave."

Tony Bennett extended his record as the artist with the most traditional pop vocal album honors with 14 wins with "Love for Sale," a duet album with Lady Gaga.

Dressed in all black, BTS took the stage with a flirty moment between V and Rodrigo before the group performed their hit single "Butter." They made an appearance after one of the members tested positive for COVID-19. All seven of the members – Jin, Jimin, V, RM, J-Hope, Suga and Jungkook – acted as if they were secret agents dodging neon-blue lasers, dancing with smooth choreography before going into a brief rap portion of the song.

Foo Fighters won three awards Sunday, but were not in attendance to pick up their trophies following

the recent death of drummer Taylor Hawkins. An extended tribute to Hawkins played before the show's In Memoriam segment honoring artists and music industry figures who've died.

Eilish paid homage to Hawkins during her performance by sporting a black T-shirt with his image. She stepped onstage in an upside-down house along with her brother Finneas before walking into a downpour to perform the title track from her "Happier Than Ever."

TJ Osborne, who came out as gay last year, fought back tears as he and his brother accepted a Grammy during the pre-telecast show for the Brothers Osborne song "Younger Me." He noted the song was inspired by his coming out.

"I never thought that I would be able to do music professionally because of my sexuality. And I certainly never thought I would be here on the stage accepting a Grammy after having done something I felt like was going to be life changing and potentially in a very negative way," Osborne said.

"And here I am tonight, not only accepting this Grammy Award with my brother, which I love so much, but I'm here with a man that I love and he loves me back" he said. "I don't know what I did to be so lucky."

The ceremony shifted in January from Los Angeles to Las Vegas because of rising COVID-19 cases and the omicron variant, with organizers citing "too many risks."

California police search for shooters who killed 6, hurt 12

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The usual crowds filled the streets as bars and nightclubs were closing in California's capital city of Sacramento when the sound of rapid-fire gunshots sent people running in terror. In a matter of seconds, the latest U.S. mass shooting had left six people dead and 12 wounded.

Sacramento police said they were searching for at least two people who opened fire around 2 a.m. Sunday on the outskirts of the city's downtown entertainment district, anchored by the Golden One Arena that hosts concerts and the NBA's Sacramento Kings. The team's home game against the Golden State Warriors went on as scheduled Sunday night and began with a moment of silence for the victims.

Police Chief Kathy Lester revealed few details from the investigation and pleaded with the public to share videos and other evidence that could lead to the killers.

"The scale of violence that just happened in our city is unprecedented during my 27 years here," Lester told reporters during a news conference at police headquarters. "We are shocked and heartbroken by this tragedy. But we are also resolved as an agency to find those responsible and to secure justice for the victims and the families."

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg and other city officials decried escalating violence in the city while also urging people to keep coming downtown for events like NBA games and performances of the Broadway musical "Wicked."

"We can never accept it as normal and we never will," Steinberg said of the shooting. "But we also have to live our lives."

The gunfire erupted just after a fight broke out on a street lined with an upscale hotel, nightclubs and bars, but police said they did not know if the altercation was connected to the shooting. Video from witnesses posted on social media showed rapid gunfire for at least 45 seconds as people screamed and ran for cover.

The gunfire startled sleeping guests at the Citizen Hotel, which included a wedding party and fans of the rapper Tyler the Creator, who performed at a concert hours earlier.

From her window on the fourth floor of the hotel, 18-year-old Kelsey Schar said she saw a man running while firing a gun. She could see flashes from the weapon in the darkness as people ran for cover.

Schar's friend, Madalyn Woodward, said she saw a girl who appeared to have been shot in the arm lying on the ground. Security guards from a nearby nightclub rushed to help the girl with what looked like napkins to try to stanch the bleeding.

Police found a stolen handgun, but they did not know if it had been used in the shooting. The dead included three men and three women. Authorities were still working to notify family members, and had

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 35 of 69

publicly identified only one victim as of late Sunday, 38-year-old Sergio Harris, without providing a cause of death. Of the 12 wounded, at least four had critical injuries, according to the Sacramento Fire Department.

Sunday's violence was the third time in the U.S. this year that at least six people have been killed in a mass shooting, according to a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University. And it was the second mass shooting in Sacramento in the last five weeks.

President Joe Biden called for action on gun crimes in a statement Sunday.

"Today, America once again mourns for another community devastated by gun violence," Biden said. "But we must do more than mourn; we must act."

On Feb. 28, a father killed his three daughters, a chaperone and himself in a Sacramento church during a weekly supervised visitation. David Mora, 39, was armed with a homemade semiautomatic rifle-style weapon, even though he was under a restraining order that prohibited him from possessing a firearm.

The crime scene Sunday sprawled across two city blocks, closing off a large swath of the city's downtown. Bodies remained on the pavement throughout the day as Lester said investigators were working to process a "really complex and complicated scene" to make sure investigators gathered all the evidence they could to "see the perpetrators of this crime brought to justice."

Councilmember Katie Valenzuela, who represents the area, said she's fielded too many phone calls reporting violence in her district during her 15 months in office. She cried at a news conference as she told reporters that the latest phone call woke her up at 2:30 a.m. Sunday.

"I'm heartbroken and I'm outraged," she said. "Our community deserves better than this."

Russia war could further escalate auto prices and shortages

By TOM KRISHER and KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writers

DETROIT (AP) — BMW has halted production at two German factories. Mercedes is slowing work at its assembly plants. Volkswagen, warning of production stoppages, is looking for alternative sources for parts.

For more than a year, the global auto industry has struggled with a disastrous shortage of computer chips and other vital parts that has shrunk production, slowed deliveries and sent prices for new and used cars soaring beyond reach for millions of consumers.

Now, a new factor — Russia's war against Ukraine — has thrown up yet another obstacle. Critically important electrical wiring, made in Ukraine, is suddenly out of reach. With buyer demand high, materials scarce and the war causing new disruptions, vehicle prices are expected to head even higher well into next year.

The war's damage to the auto industry has emerged first in Europe. But U.S. production will likely suffer eventually, too, if Russian exports of metals — from palladium for catalytic converters to nickel for electric vehicle batteries — are cut off.

"You only need to miss one part not to be able to make a car," said Mark Wakefield, co-leader of consulting firm Alix Partners' global automotive unit. "Any bump in the road becomes either a disruption of production or a vastly unplanned-for cost increase."

Supply problems have bedeviled automakers since the pandemic erupted two years ago, at times shuttering factories and causing vehicle shortages. The robust recovery that followed the recession caused demand for autos to vastly outstrip supply — a mismatch that sent prices for new and used vehicles skyrocketing well beyond overall high inflation.

In the United States, the average price of a new vehicle is up 13% in the past year, to \$45,596, according to Edmunds.com. Average used prices have surged far more: They're up 29% to \$29,646 as of February.

Before the war, S&P Global Mobility had predicted that global automakers would build 84 million vehicles this year and 91 million next year. (By comparison, they built 94 million in 2018.) Now it's forecasting fewer than 82 million in 2022 and 88 million next year.

Mark Fulthorpe, an executive director for S&P, is among analysts who think the availability of new vehicles in North America and Europe will remain severely tight — and prices high — well into 2023. Compounding the problem, buyers who are priced out of the new-vehicle market will intensify demand for used autos

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 36 of 69

and keep those prices elevated, too — prohibitively so for many households.

Eventually, high inflation across the economy — for food, gasoline, rent and other necessities — will likely leave a vast number of ordinary buyers unable to afford a new or used vehicle. Demand would then wane. And so, eventually, would prices.

“Until inflationary pressures start to really erode consumer and business capabilities,” Fulthorpe said, “it’s probably going to mean that those who have the inclination to buy a new vehicle, they’ll be prepared to pay top dollar.”

One factor behind the dimming outlook for production is the shuttering of auto plants in Russia. Last week, French automaker Renault, one of the last automakers that have continued to build in Russia, said it would suspend production in Moscow.

The transformation of Ukraine into an embattled war zone has hurt, too. Wells Fargo estimates that 10% to 15% of crucial wiring harnesses that supply vehicle production in the vast European Union were made in Ukraine. In the past decade, automakers and parts companies invested in Ukrainian factories to limit costs and gain proximity to European plants.

The wiring shortage has slowed factories in Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic and elsewhere, leading S&P to slash its forecast for worldwide auto production by 2.6 million vehicles for both this year and next. The shortages could reduce exports of German vehicles to the United States and elsewhere.

Wiring harnesses are bundles of wires and connectors that are unique to each model; they can’t be easily re-sourced to another parts maker. Despite the war, harness makers like Aptiv and Leoni have managed to reopen factories sporadically in Western Ukraine. Still Joseph Massaro, Aptiv’s chief financial officer, acknowledged that Ukraine “is not open for any type of normal commercial activity.”

Aptiv, based in Dublin, is trying to shift production to Poland, Romania, Serbia and possibly Morocco. But the process will take up to six weeks, leaving some automakers short of parts during that time.

“Long term,” Massaro told analysts, “we’ll have to assess if and when it makes sense to go back to Ukraine.”

BMW is trying to coordinate with its Ukrainian suppliers and is casting a wider net for parts. So are Mercedes and Volkswagen.

Yet finding alternative supplies may be next to impossible. Most parts plants are operating close to capacity, so new work space would have to be built. Companies would need months to hire more people and add work shifts.

“The training process to bring up to speed a new workforce — it’s not an overnight thing,” Fulthorpe said.

Fulthorpe said he foresees a further tightening supply of materials from both Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine is the world’s largest exporter of neon, a gas used in lasers that etch circuits onto computer chips. Most chip makers have a six-month supply; late in the year, they could run short. That would worsen the chip shortage, which before the war had been delaying production even more than automakers expected.

Likewise, Russia is a key supplier of such raw materials as platinum and palladium, used in pollution-reducing catalytic converters. Russia also produces 10% of the world’s nickel, an essential ingredient in EV batteries.

Mineral supplies from Russia haven’t been shut off yet. Recycling might help ease the shortage. Other countries may increase production. And some manufacturers have stockpiled the metals.

But Russia also is a big aluminum producer, and a source of pig iron, used to make steel. Nearly 70% of U.S. pig iron imports come from Russia and Ukraine, Alix Partners says, so steelmakers will need to switch to production from Brazil or use alternative materials. In the meantime, steel prices have rocketed up from \$900 a ton a few weeks ago to \$1,500 now.

So far, negotiations toward a cease-fire in Ukraine have gone nowhere, and the fighting has raged on. A new virus surge in China could cut into parts supplies, too. Industry analysts say they have no clear idea when parts, raw materials and auto production will flow normally.

Even if a deal is negotiated to suspend fighting, sanctions against Russian exports would remain intact until after a final agreement had been reached. Even then, supplies wouldn’t start flowing normally. Fult-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 37 of 69

horpe said there would be "further hangovers because of disruption that will take place in the widespread supply chains."

Wakefield noted, too, that because of intense pent-up demand for vehicles across the world, even if automakers restore full production, the process of building enough vehicles will be a protracted one.

When might the world produce an ample enough supply of cars and trucks to meet demand and keep prices down?

Wakefield doesn't profess to know.

"We're in a raising-price environment, a (production)-constrained environment," he said. "That's a weird thing for the auto industry."

Ex-finance minister wins runoff to be Costa Rica's president

By JAVIER CORDOBA Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (AP) — A former finance minister who surprised many by making it into Costa Rica's presidential runoff vote has easily won that ballot and is to become the Central American country's new leader next month, while still fending off accusations of sexual harassment when he worked at the World Bank.

With nearly all polling stations reporting late Sunday, conservative economist Rodrigo Chaves had 53% of the vote, compared to 47% for former President José Figueres Ferrer, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal said.

More than 42% of eligible voters did not participate in Sunday's election, however, reflecting the lack of enthusiasm Costa Ricans had for the candidates.

In his victory speech, Chaves said he received the result with humility and called for unity to address problems like unemployment and a soaring budget deficit.

"For me this is not a medal nor a trophy, but rather an enormous responsibility, heaped with challenges and difficulties that we will all resolve," he said.

"Costa Rica, the best is to come!" Chaves said before celebrating supporters. His inauguration is scheduled for May 8.

Figueres conceded defeat less than an hour after results began to come in. He had led the first round of voting Feb. 6, with Chaves in second that day. Neither had come close to the 40% of the vote needed to avoid a runoff.

"Costa Rica has voted and the people have spoken," Figueres said. "As the democrats we are we will always be respectful of that decision."

He congratulated Chaves and wished him the best, adding that continues to believe that Costa Rica is in a "deep crisis" and he is willing to help it recover.

Figueres, who was Costa Rica's president from 1994 to 1998, represents the National Liberation Party like his father, three-time president José Figueres Ferrer. Chaves served briefly in the administration of outgoing President Carlos Alvarado and represents the Social Democratic Progress Party.

Both men waged a bruising campaign that highlighted past controversies.

Chaves' campaign is under investigation by electoral authorities for allegedly running an illegal parallel financing structure. He also has been dogged by a sexual harassment scandal that drove him out of the World Bank.

While working at the World Bank he was accused of sexual harassment by multiple women, was eventually demoted and then resigned. He has denied the accusations.

The World Bank's administrative Tribunal last year criticized the way the case was initially handled internally.

The tribunal noted that an internal investigation had found that from 2008 to 2013 Chaves leered at, made unwelcome comments about physical appearance, repeated sexual innuendo and unwelcome sexual advances toward multiple bank employees. Those details were repeated by the bank's human resources department in a letter to Chaves, but it decided to sanction him for misconduct rather than

sexual harassment.

"The facts of the present case indicate that (Chaves') conduct was sexual in nature and that he knew or should have known that his conduct was unwelcome," the tribunal wrote. The tribunal also noted that in the proceedings, the banks current vice president for human resources said in testimony "that the undisputed facts legally amount to sexual harassment."

More than 3.5 million Costa Ricans were eligible to vote, but with many voters underwhelmed by the options, turnout was even lower than the 60% in February.

Lines formed before voting started at some polling places in San Jose, the capital, while others appeared nearly empty.

Political analyst Francisco Barahona said Costa Ricans' lack of enthusiasm was the result of the multitude of personal attacks that characterized the campaign.

"In the debates they only heated things up in personal confrontations, mistreatment of each other," he said. "They didn't add depth to their proposals to resolve the country's problems. The debates didn't help to motivate the electorate."

"For a lot of people it's embarrassing to say they voted for one or the other, and many prefer to say they won't vote for either of the candidates or simply won't go to vote," Barahona added.

Figueres has been questioned over a \$900,000 consulting fee he received after his presidency from the telecommunication company Alcatel while it competed for a contract with the national electricity company. He was never charged with any crime and denied any wrongdoing.

While Costa Rica has enjoyed relative democratic stability compared with other countries in the region, the public has grown frustrated with public corruption scandals and high unemployment.

In the February vote, Alvarado's party was practically erased from the political landscape, receiving no seats in the new congress. At the time of that first vote, the country was riding a new wave of COVID-19 infections, but infections and hospitalizations have fallen considerably since.

'Green steel' heating up in Sweden's frozen north

By JAMES BROOKS Associated Press

LULEA, Sweden (AP) — For hundreds of years, raging blast furnaces — fed with coking coal — have forged steel used in cars, railways, bridges and skyscrapers.

But the puffs of coal-fired smoke are a big source of carbon dioxide, the heat-trapping gas that's driving climate change.

According to the World Steel Association, every metric ton of steel produced in 2020 emitted almost twice that much carbon dioxide (1.8 tons) into the atmosphere. Total direct emissions from making steel were about 2.6 billion tons in 2020, representing around 7% of global CO2 emissions.

In Sweden, a single company, steel giant SSAB, accounts for about 10% of the country's emissions due to the furnaces it operates at mills like the one in the northern town of Lulea.

But not far away, a high-tech pilot plant is seeking to significantly reduce the carbon emissions involved in steel production by switching some of that process away from burning coking coal to burning hydrogen that itself was produced with renewable energy.

HYBRIT — or Hydrogen Breakthrough Ironmaking Technology — is a joint venture between SSAB, mining company LKAB and Swedish state-owned power firm Vattenfall launched in 2016.

"The cost of renewable energy, fossil-free energy, had come down dramatically and at the same time, you had a rising awareness and the Paris Agreement" in 2015 to reduce global emissions, said Mikael Nordlander, Vattenfall's head of industry decarbonization.

"We realized that we might have a chance now to outcompete the direct use of fossil fuels in industry with this electricity coming from fossil-free sources," he added.

Last year, the plant made its first commercial delivery. European carmakers that have committed to dramatically reducing their emissions need cleaner steel. Chinese-owned Volvo Group became the first carmaker to partner with HYBRIT. Head of procurement Kerstin Enochsson said steel is a "major contribu-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 39 of 69

tor" to their cars' carbon footprint, between 20 and 35%.

"Tackling only the tailpipe emissions by being an electric company is not enough. We need to focus on the car itself, as well," she said.

Demand from other companies, including Volkswagen, is also sending a signal that there is demand for green steel. Steelmakers in Europe have announced plans to scale up production of steel made without coal.

The HYBRIT process aims to replace the coking coal that's traditionally used for ore-based steel making with hydrogen and renewable electricity.

It begins with brown-tinged iron ore pellets that react with the hydrogen gas and are reduced to ball-shaped "sponge iron," which takes its name due to pores left behind following the removal of oxygen. This is then melted in an electric furnace.

If the hydrogen is made using renewable energy, too, the process produces no CO2.

"We get iron, and then we get water vapor instead," said SSAB's chief technology officer Martin Pei. "Water vapor can be condensed, recirculated, reused in the process.

"We really solve the root cause of carbon dioxide emissions from steel making," he said.

Steel is a recyclable material, but demand for the alloy is expected to grow in the coming years, amid a push to transform society and build wind turbines, solar plants, power transmission lines and new electric vehicles.

"Steel is a superb construction material. It is also possible to recycle steel again and again," said Pei. "You can reuse steel as many times as possible.

"The only problem today is the current way of making steel from iron ore emits too much CO2," he said.

By the end of this decade, the European Union is attempting to cut overall CO2 emissions in the 27-nation bloc by 55% compared to 1990 levels. Part of that effort includes making companies pay for their CO2 emissions and encourage the switch to low-carbon alternatives.

Sweden's steel industry has set out plans to achieve "fossil-free" operations by 2045. SSAB in January brought forward its own plans to largely eliminate carbon dioxide emissions in its steel-making processes by the end of the decade.

"The companies are well aware of their possibilities and limitations in the current processes and that they have to do something about it," said Helen Axelsson, director of energy and environment at Jernkontoret, the Swedish steel producers' association.

But according to the World Steel Association, over 70% of global steel production takes place in Asia, where steel producers don't have access to the same quantities of old scrap steel as countries that have been industrialized for a longer time. That's another reason why average emissions per ton of steel are higher in the global south.

Filip Johnsson, a professor in energy technology at Gothenburg's Chalmers University, said the vast amounts of renewable electricity necessary to make hydrogen and cleaner steel could make rolling out the HYBRIT process difficult in other parts of the world.

"I would say that the major challenge is to get loads of electricity and also to provide it sort of constantly," he said.

The small Lulea pilot plant is still a research facility, and has so far produced just a couple of hundred tons. There are plans to construct a larger demonstration plant and begin commercial deliveries by 2026.

Ukraine accuses Russia of massacre, city strewn with bodies

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI and NEBI QENA Associated Press

BUCHA, Ukraine (AP) — Bodies with bound hands, close-range gunshot wounds and signs of torture lay scattered in a city on the outskirts of Kyiv after Russian soldiers withdrew from the area. Ukrainian authorities accused the departing forces on Sunday of committing war crimes and leaving behind a "scene from a horror movie."

As images of the bodies emerged from Bucha, European leaders condemned the atrocities and called for

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 40 of 69

tougher sanctions against Moscow. In a sign of how the horrific reports shook many leaders, Germany's defense minister even suggested that the European Union consider banning Russian gas imports.

Ukrainian officials said the bodies of 410 civilians were found in Kyiv-area towns that were recently retaken from Russian forces.

Associated Press journalists saw the bodies of at least 21 people in various spots around Bucha, north-west of the capital. One group of nine, all in civilian clothes, were scattered around a site that residents said Russian troops used as a base. They appeared to have been killed at close range. At least two had their hands tied behind their backs, one was shot in the head, and another's legs were bound.

Ukrainian officials laid the blame for the killings squarely at the feet of Russian troops, with the president calling them evidence of genocide. But Russia's Defense Ministry rejected the accusations as "provocation."

The discoveries followed the Russian retreat from the area after Moscow said it was focusing its offensive on the country's east. Russian troops had rolled into Bucha in the early days of the invasion and stayed up until March 30.

One resident, who refused to give his name out of fear for his safety, said that Russian troops went building to building and took people out of the basements where they were hiding, checking their phones for any evidence of anti-Russian activity before taking them away or shooting them.

Hanna Herega, another resident, said Russian troops started shooting at a neighbor who had gone out to gather wood for heating.

"They hit him a bit above the heel, crushing the bone, and he fell down," Herega said. "Then they shot off his left leg completely, with the boot. Then they shot him all over."

The AP also saw two bodies, that of a man and a woman, wrapped in plastic that residents said they had covered and placed in a shaft until a proper funeral could be arranged.

"He put his hands up, and they shot him," said the resident who refused to be identified.

Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, described bodies lying in suburban streets as a "scene from a horror movie." He claimed some of the women had been raped before being killed and the Russians then burned the bodies.

In a video address, Zelenskyy said Russian soldiers who killed and tortured civilians were responsible for "concentrated evil."

"It is time to do everything possible to make the war crimes of the Russian military the last manifestation of such evil on earth," he said in remarks translated by his office.

He directed some of his remarks at the mothers of Russian soldiers involved.

"Even if you raised looters, how did they also become butchers?" he said. "You couldn't overlook that they are deprived of everything human. No soul. No heart. They killed deliberately and with pleasure."

Zelenskyy said his government would take steps to create a special justice mechanism to investigate every crime committed by the Russian forces in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy also appeared in a pre-recorded video message at Sunday's Grammy Awards, contrasting the lives of those attending the award ceremony in Las Vegas with the lives of musicians in his battered homeland.

"Our musicians wear body armor instead of tuxedos. They sing to the wounded in hospitals, even to those who can't hear them," he said in English. "But the music will break through anyway."

Russia's Defense Ministry said in a statement that photos and videos of dead bodies "have been stage managed by the Kyiv regime for the Western media."

The ministry said "not a single civilian" in Bucha had faced any violent military action and the mayor did not mention any abuses a day after Russian troops left.

Russia asked for a meeting Monday of the U.N. Security Council to discuss events in the city. The U.S. and Britain have recently accused Russia of using Security Council meetings to spread disinformation.

In Motyzhyn, some 50 kilometers (30 miles) west of Kyiv, residents told AP that Russian troops killed the town's mayor, her husband and her son and threw their bodies into a pit in a pine forest behind houses where Russian forces had slept.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 41 of 69

Inside the pit, AP journalists saw four bodies of people who appeared to have been shot at close range. The mayor's husband had his hands behind his back, with a piece of rope nearby, and a piece of plastic wrapped around his eyes like a blindfold.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk confirmed that the mayor was killed while being held by Russian forces.

Some European leaders said the killings in the Kyiv area amounted to war crimes. The U.S. has previously said that it believes Russia has committed war crimes, and Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called images of what happened near Kyiv "a punch to the gut" on CNN's "State of the Union."

"It is a brutality against civilians we haven't seen in Europe for decades," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on the same show.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko called on nations to immediately end Russian gas imports, saying they were funding the killings.

In a turnaround, Germany's defense minister said that the EU should consider doing just that. Ministers "would have to talk about halting gas supplies from Russia," Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht said on German public broadcaster ARD. "Such crimes must not go unanswered."

Russia provides 40% of Europe's gas and 25% of its oil, and until now many EU nations have resisted calls to scale back or fully end reliance on Russian fossil fuels. Giving them up would mean even higher prices at the pump and higher utility bills, potentially creating an energy crisis and a recession.

The U.S. has previously announced a ban on Russian oil, but it imports only a small share of Russia's oil exports and doesn't buy any of its natural gas.

As Russian forces retreated from the area around the capital, they also withdrew from the Sumy region, in Ukraine's northeast, local administrator Dmitry Zhivitsky said in a video message carried by Ukrainian news agencies. The troops had occupied the area for nearly a month.

They pressed their sieges in other parts of the country. Russia has said it is directing troops to the Donbas in eastern Ukraine, where Russia-backed separatists have been fighting Ukrainian forces for eight years.

In that region, Mariupol, a port on the Sea of Azov that has seen some of the war's greatest suffering, remained cut off. About 100,000 civilians — less than a quarter of the prewar population of 430,000 — are believed to be trapped there with little or no food, water, fuel and medicine.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said Sunday that a team sent Saturday to help evacuate residents had yet to reach the city.

Ukrainian authorities said Russia agreed days ago to allow safe passage from the city, but similar agreements have broken down repeatedly under continued shelling.

The mayor of Chernihiv, which has also been cut off from shipments of food and other supplies for weeks, said that relentless Russian shelling has destroyed 70% of the northern city.

The Ukrainian military said early Monday that its forces had retaken some towns in the Chernihiv region and that humanitarian aid was being delivered. The road between Chernihiv and the capital, Kyiv, was to reopen to some traffic later in the morning, according to the news agency RBK Ukraina.

The regional governor in Kharkiv said that Russian artillery and tanks launched over 20 strikes on Ukraine's second-largest city and its outskirts in the country's northeast over the past day.

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 Russian invasion has left thousands dead and forced more than 4 million Ukrainians to flee their country.

Billions, and more, for lawmakers' projects in spending bill

By ALAN FRAM and AARON M. KESSLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Home-district projects for members of Congress are back, sprinkled across the government-wide \$1.5 trillion bill President Joe Biden signed recently. The official tally shows amounts modest by past standards yet spread widely around the country — and that understate what lawmakers

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 42 of 69

are claiming credit for.

The bipartisan measure, financing federal agencies this year, contains 4,975 such projects worth \$9.7 billion, according to an Associated Press examination of items attributed to specific lawmakers in documents accompanying the bill. The listed projects, long called earmarks, ranged from \$4,000 for evidence detection equipment for Huntington, West Virginia, to \$350 million to help restore Florida's vast but imperiled Everglades.

The projects' reemergence after an 11-year hiatus, with transparency requirements and other curbs, marks a revival of expenditures that let lawmakers tout achievements to voters and help party leaders build support for legislation. While still vilified by some, especially conservatives, as emblems of influence peddling and wasteful spending, they've been embraced by lawmakers from both parties, who cite Congress' constitutional power of the purse and say they know their local needs.

Retiring Sen. Richard Shelby attained \$126 million for two campuses of the University of Alabama, his alma mater, including for an endowment for its flagship Tuscaloosa campus to hire science and engineering faculty. There was also hundreds of millions to improve the city of Mobile's seaport and airport, part of an eye-popping \$648 million he amassed for his state, according to the legislation's explanatory documents.

The price tag of Shelby's projects was the highest in Congress, according to Taxpayers for Common Sense, a nonpartisan group that favors fiscal restraint and conducted its own preliminary analysis. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., was next at \$361 million.

"I'm very proud of them," said Shelby, top Republican on the Senate Appropriations Committee, which writes spending bills. He rebuffed complaints that it was unfair for senior lawmakers to use clout to garner federal spending.

"I think you earn your way," Shelby, in Congress since 1979, said in a brief interview. "And that's what people do in any legislative body. And people vote on them. That's what it's all about."

In press releases issued as Congress approved the legislation last month, Shelby took credit for winning "billions" for Alabama, well beyond the amount in the public list. His statements cited \$1.3 billion for flight training at Fort Rucker, an Army base, \$570 million for construction on an FBI technical center at the Army's Redstone Arsenal and other items not on the legislation's official roster of projects.

Claims they'd brought even more money back home than the tables showed were common among lawmakers. That's because Congress narrowly defines home-district projects as lawmaker-driven expenditures for specific locations or recipients that existing laws or agency procedures wouldn't have automatically triggered.

That leaves room, for example, for legislators to take credit for bolstering broad national programs they know benefit their states without having the items listed publicly as home district projects, a characterization that can still attract disdain.

"Those lawmakers know where that money is going," said Steve Ellis, the Taxpayers group president.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., had 203 projects for New York, ranging from \$27 million to upgrade Fort Drum's water systems to \$44,000 for neighborhood improvements in the city of Geneva, the AP found. Facing what should be easy reelection this fall, Schumer totaled \$314 million, including at least \$23 million for hospitals, violence prevention and other programs in his home borough of Brooklyn.

Schumer had more home district projects than anyone else in Congress, the Taxpayers organization's figures showed. Next came Oregon Democratic Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, who each had fewer than 150. The House limited lawmakers to a maximum of 10.

Schumer sponsored many projects along with Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., and some of the state's House members. In press releases, he took credit for even more — such as \$293 million he and Gillibrand said they'd secured for the Air Force Research Laboratory in Rome, N.Y., following "their fierce advocacy."

Fewer than 150 lawmakers received no listed projects, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. Yet in a seven-page press release, he cited over three dozen items he said he'd "secured" that would benefit his state.

These included \$321 million for an environmental cleanup at an old uranium enrichment plant in Paducah, \$73 million to refurbish barracks at Fort Campbell and money for nationwide substance abuse,

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 43 of 69

water project and other programs that help the state.

"I was proud to help craft this legislation with a special focus on Kentucky," he wrote.

Long distributed with little transparency, Congress stopped providing earmarks in 2011 after high-profile abuses soured voters on them.

Leaders resuscitated the practice for this year with restrictions forbidding financial interest in the projects by lawmakers, requiring public disclosure of requests, barring for-profit recipients and curbing spending amounts. In a rebranding, they're now called community project funding by the House, congressionally directed spending by the Senate.

Whatever their name, the projects retain a stigma to some, especially Republicans.

All but a handful of the 222 House Democrats requested projects for this year's bill, compared with around half the 210 Republicans. In the 50-50 Senate, the items were sought by 46 Democrats and their two allied independents, but just 16 Republicans.

Only three states received no projects after their congressional delegations declined to request any: Montana, North Dakota and Wyoming. Eight of the nine lawmakers representing those conservative states are Republicans.

Even so, much of the largesse in the 2,741-page legislation was bipartisan.

The measure provided \$5.1 billion for Democrats, \$3.4 billion for Republicans and \$600 million for projects sponsored by members of both parties, according to the Taxpayers group. Nearly all who requested projects got some.

The AP's figures include spending that the documents showed was also requested by Biden, which enhanced its chances. The entire \$350 million Everglades restoration project, requested by Rep. Brian Mast, R-Fla., was sought by Biden, and at least \$99 million that Shelby procured was also proposed by the president.

The magnitude of this year's projects was small compared with 2010, the last time Congress used earmarks. Lawmakers disclosed 11,320 of them worth \$32 billion that year, according to the Congressional Research Service, Congress' nonpartisan research agency. Though the numbers aren't exactly comparable due to differing methodologies, earmarks that year consumed nearly 2.5% of federal agency budgets, while this year's are about half of 1% of the total.

Even so, there was plenty of room to spread this year's money around.

Around 3 in 4 House members and 64 of the 100 senators got projects, according to the Taxpayers organization. So did the non-voting House members from the District of Columbia and four of the five represented U.S. territories.

California's \$757 million was the highest total for any state, the Taxpayers group found. Largely due to Shelby, Alabama was next at \$542 million — though its population is roughly one-eighth of California's 39 million people.

There was even room to reward lawmakers who opposed the overall legislation.

Of the 106 House Republicans with projects in the bill, 70 voted against either or both sections of the legislation yet still collected spending worth \$946 million, according to Taxpayers. That included 14 who opposed both parts of the measure yet still got \$187 million. In an unusual procedure, the House divided the bill into distinct security and non-security segments and approved both separately.

Rep. Garret Graves, R-La., voted against both portions of the legislation yet won projects worth \$45 million, among the House's highest figures. He said he didn't like the overall bill's size and its lack of money for his state to recover from recent hurricanes.

"I'm supposed to say I didn't vote for the bill, so I'm not going to go work projects for our district?" said Graves, who won funds for water projects and sugar cane research. "No, that's not what our job is."

Five GOP senators who opposed the bill received projects worth \$386 million, the Taxpayers group's figures show: John Boozman of Arkansas, Richard Burr and Thom Tillis of North Carolina, Bill Cassidy of Louisiana and Mike Rounds of South Dakota.

And 6 of 15 House Democrats who voted against the security part of the legislation had projects in that

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 44 of 69

section, though they totaled just \$9 million. No House Democrats opposed the non-security provisions.

Favorable treatment for such lawmakers is befuddling to old-school lawmakers.

If someone was opposing legislation bearing a project they'd requested, "I'd explain to them that by and large, if they ever wanted an earmark again they'd vote for the bill," former Rep. Bob Livingston, R-La., said in a recent interview. He chaired the House Appropriations Committee in the 1990s.

Even Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., perhaps Congress' most notorious recent mutineer, did well. He backed the \$1.5 trillion bill last month, but in December famously opposed Biden's earlier social and environment legislation, sinking it.

Rather than being punished by Democratic leaders for upending what was the party's top legislative goal, the spending bill Biden signed had 86 West Virginia projects Manchin requested worth \$164 million. That included \$22 million he and Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., won for water treatment for the city of Weirton.

Capitol Hill veterans suggested Manchin was treated well because Democrats will need him this year in the evenly divided Senate, including in efforts to revive Biden's prized domestic bill.

"Anybody focused on the past and not the future is not much of a legislator," said Scott Lilly, a former top House Democratic aide.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., also was not listed as having projects. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., got a handful worth \$11 million, largely for low-income housing and other social initiatives in her hometown of San Francisco.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., notched \$167 million for his state. House Appropriations Committee Chair Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., garnered projects worth a relatively modest \$14 million, but none were listed for Rep. Kay Granger of Texas, top Republican on that House panel.

Even so, a Granger press release said she'd "secured major funding" for her area with money to build jet fighters, combat drug abuse and battle feral hogs.

"I'm going to choose my words very carefully here. Let's just say that as a rule, senior members do rather well in the appropriations process," said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., a veteran member of the House Appropriations Committee.

Of five senators facing tough reelection races this fall, three Democrats received at least \$81 million each in projects: Sens. Mark Kelly of Arizona, Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada and Raphael Warnock of Georgia. Two others, Sens. Maggie Hassan, D-N.H., and Ron Johnson, R-Wis., requested and received none.

While McCarthy wasn't listed as getting projects, his top two lieutenants were. No. 2 leader Steve Scalise, R-La., got \$31 million, including \$5 million for Louisiana State University aerospace research. No. 3 GOP leader Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., won \$35 million, including sharing credit with Schumer and Gillibrand for improving Fort Drum's \$27 million water project.

No. 2 Senate Democrat Richard Durbin of Illinois had \$182 million while No. 2 House Democrat Steny Hoyer of Maryland landed \$13 million.

Grammys live | Jon Batiste wins album of the year

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The Latest on the 64th annual Grammy Awards, being presented Sunday in Las Vegas (all times local):

8:25 p.m.

Jon Batiste's "We Are" has won the Grammy Award for album of the year.

Batiste was the year's most nominated artist, and had already won four Grammys on Sunday, but the win was still an upset of sorts over albums from better-known competitors. including Doja Cat, Olivia Rodrigo, Justin Bieber, Billie Eilish and Taylor Swift.

"I love you even if I don't know you! Good night!" a gleeful and stunned Batiste said to end his acceptance speech.

All of Batiste's other wins came before the Grammys telecast began, and it appeared he might not win

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 45 of 69

any on TV despite a leading 11 nominations.

8:12 p.m.

It's been a smooth and spectacular Grammys for Silk Sonic.

The R&B super-duo featuring Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak won Grammy Awards for record of the year and song of the year on Sunday night for "Leave the Door Open."

Mars joins Paul Simon as the only person to win record of the year three times.

The duo, decked out in 1970s-style formal wear, did a sexy-slo mo dance as they stood up after each win.

"We are really trying our hardest to remain humble at this point," .Paak said after winning record of the year. "But in the industry, they call that a clean sweep!" later adding "drinks is on Silk Sonic tonight!"

The two men, who performed to open the show in Las Vegas, also won a Grammy for best R&B performance.

8:09 p.m.

Doja Cat had to sprint to get her first career Grammy.

She won best pop duo/group performance on Sunday for "Kiss Me More" featuring SZA, who despite being on crutches easily beat her collaborator to the stage.

Sweaty and breathing heavy, Doja Cat said "I have never taken such a fast piss in my whole life."

Genuine emotion took over as she stood on the stage and considered the moment.

"This is a really big deal," she said through tears.

7:42 p.m.

The Grammys paid tribute to Foo Fighters drummer Taylor Hawkins, who died just nine days before a ceremony where the band won three awards and was supposed to perform.

Host Trevor Noah said on the telecast Sunday that "this was the moment in the show when I was supposed to be introducing the Foo Fighters. We would have been celebrating with them as they won three Grammy awards. But they, of course, not here due to the tragic passing of their legendary drummer, Taylor Hawkins."

Noah instead introduced a montage of memorable Hawkins moments.

The clips led off the Grammys' in memoriam segment, presented with a medley of the songs of Stephen Sondheim, who died in 2021, sung by Cynthia Erivo, Leslie Odom Jr., Ben Platt and Rachel Zegler.

Earlier Sunday, Foo Fighters won Grammys for best rock performance, best rock song and best rock album.

No one from the band appeared to accept the awards.

Hawkins, the band's drummer for 25 years and best friend of frontman Dave Grohl, died at age 50 in Bogota, Colombia, on March 25.

7:24 p.m.

Jazmine Sullivan has won her second Grammy, and she gets this one all to herself.

Sullivan won best R&B album at the Grammy Awards on Sunday for "Heaux Tales."

"I think I wrote this album to deal with my own shame around some of the decisions I made in my 20s," the 34-year-old Sullivan said as she accepted the award. "What it ended up being was a safe space for black women to tell their stories."

Earlier Sunday, Sullivan won her first Grammy, for best R&B performance, for "Pick Up Your Feelings." The win was a tie with Silk Sonic.

7:05 p.m.

Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy appeared in a video message at the Grammy Awards to ask for support in telling the story of Ukraine's invasion by Russia.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 46 of 69

During the message that aired on the show Sunday, he likened the invasion to a deadly silence threatening to extinguish the dreams and lives of the Ukrainian people, including children.

"Our musicians wear body armor instead of tuxedos. They sing to the wounded in hospitals, even to those who can't hear them," he said. "But the music will break through anyway."

The Recording Academy, with its partner Global Citizen, prior to the ceremony highlighted a social media campaign called "Stand Up For Ukraine" to raise money and support during the humanitarian crisis.

"Fill the silence with your music. Fill it today to tell our story. Tell the truth about the war on your social networks, on TV, support us in any way you can any, but not silence. And then peace will come to all our cities," Zelenskyy said.

Following Zelenskyy's message, John Legend performed his song "Free" with Ukrainian musicians Siuzanna Iglidan and Mika Newton, and poet Lyuba Yakimchuk, as images from the war were shown on screens behind them.

6:49 p.m.

Las Vegas is lucky for Baby Keem.

The 21-year-old won best rap performance at the Grammy Awards at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas on Sunday for "Family Ties," a song that features his cousin Kendrick Lamar.

Baby Keem is from Las Vegas, where the Grammys were moved after coronavirus concerns brought the postponement of a ceremony originally scheduled for Los Angeles.

Backstage after winning, Keem said "It feels like some sort of magic that Vegas is all of the sudden hosting the Grammys and I'm from here and I got my first one here."

6:13 p.m.

She got her license, and now she's got her second Grammy.

Olivia Rodrigo was named best new artist at the Grammy Awards in Las Vegas on Sunday night.

Rodrigo was in tears as she took the stage to accept the award. She said "this is my biggest dream come true."

The 19-year-old singer-songwriter and Disney Channel star had a breakout musical year with her hit album "Sour" and smash single "Drivers License."

Earlier Sunday, Rodrigo won her first Grammy for best pop solo vocal performance for "Drivers License," which she performed at the beginning of the telecast.

She's also nominated for record of the year and album of the year.

Women have dominated the best new artist category in recent years. The past three winners included Dua Lipa and Megan Thee Stallion, who presented the award to Rodrigo, and Billie Eilish, who performed just before it was handed out.

6 p.m.

Chris Stapleton's "Starting Over" has won the Grammy for best country album.

Stapleton took the award Sunday on the birthday of his 4-year-old twins, two of his five children, and said he was sad that the career that brought him such accolades has forced him to be away from home on so many special days.

It was Stapleton's third Grammy of the day.

Earlier, he won best country solo performance for a record third time for his song "You Should Probably Leave."

And he and three co-writers won country song of the year for "Cold."

Stapleton, who also performs later in the show, has won eight career Grammys overall.

5:33 p.m.

Silk Sonic is having a funky Grammys.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 47 of 69

The Grammy Award for song of the year goes to the duo's "Leave The Door Open."

The songwriting award goes to the duo's two members, Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak, along with two co-writers.

The award was the first handed out during Sunday's telecast of the Grammys from the MGM Grand Garden arena in Las Vegas.

Mars and .Paak stood up and grooved when the win was announced and the song played.

The two men, who performed to open the show, also won a Grammy for best R&B performance before the telecast started.

5:15 p.m.

Host Trevor Noah has opened a Grammy Awards show that he says will be part party, part concert, with some trophies handed out in between.

The comedian and "Daily Show" host delivered his opening monologue between performances by Silk Sonic and Olivia Rodrigo at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas on Sunday night.

He walked among tables set up near the stage instead of theater seats.

"Look at this room, this is a party, everyone's hanging out we've got the tables, we're doing shots. Last year we were doing shots like Moderna and Pfizer," Noah said.

He added, "We're going to be dancing, we're going to be singing, we're going to be keeping people's names out of our mouths."

The crowd laughed at the reference to Will Smith shouting to Chris Rock to keep wife Jada Pinkett Smith's name out of his mouth after slapping Rock on the Oscars stage a week earlier.

It was Noah's second-straight year hosting the show, but the first with a typical, arena-sized Grammy crowd.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, last year's awards were held in an outdoor pavilion in Los Angeles with only a small audience of nominees and guests.

5 p.m.

Silk Sonic brought back the '70s with a Vegas-inspired set to open the Grammy Awards in Sin City on Sunday with spinning roulette wheels on the screens.

The duo of Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak set the tone with their performance of "777" and a jamming horn section. Mars started the show imploring the Las Vegas crowd at the MGM Grand Arena to get up and dance.

The pair won two awards during the pre-telecast ceremony and are nominated for record and song of the year. The duo's song "Leave the Door Open" and Jazmine Sullivan's "Pick Up Your Feelings" tied to win best R&B performance, and "Leave the Door Open" won best R&B song.

4:40 p.m.

BTS has arrived at the Grammys full strength after one of their members recently tested positive for COVID-19.

All seven members of the Korean megastar boy band walked the carpet wearing custom Louis Vuitton suits with sneakers in a range of colors from bright white to muted blue. Member V wore a bouquet of giant floral pins.

The group, which is nominated for their hit "Butter," will also perform on the show.

Member Jungkook was recently tested positive for the coronavirus,

4:05 p.m.

Olivia Rodrigo has won her first career Grammy in what could be the beginning of a big night.

The 19-year-old won the award Sunday for best pop solo performance for her viral hit "Drivers License."

The viral single made a pop star out of the Disney Channel actor and turned her album "Sour" into one

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 48 of 69

of the biggest of the year.

Rodrigo did not accept the award in person, which was presented before the Grammys telecast, but is slated to be a performer during the show. She walked the red carpet in a black sheath gown from Vivienne Westwood, who included purple sparkle trim.

She's nominated for six more Grammys on Sunday night including best new artist and album of the year.

3:39 p.m.

Foo Fighters have won three Grammys just days after the death of their drummer Taylor Hawkins.

The group won Grammys for best rock performance, best rock song and best rock album.

No one from the band appeared to accept the award at the Sunday ceremony in Las Vegas.

Hawkins had been the band's drummer for 25 years and was the best friend of Foo Fighters' frontman Dave Grohl.

They had been scheduled to perform on the Grammys telecast. Producers say Hawkins will be honored during the ceremony.

Hawkins died at age 50 in Bogota, Colombia, where the band had been scheduled to play a music festival on March 25.

3:22 p.m.

Last week's slap at the Oscars got some early laughs at the Grammys.

LeVar Burton, the host of the pre-show ceremonies Sunday, introduced comedian Nate Bargatze and told everyone they needed to stay in their seats.

"I need to warn everybody, the next presenter is a comedian," Burton said. "I need to caution everybody, remain in your seats and keep your hands to yourselves."

Bargatze came out with a comically oversized helmet just in case.

"They said comedians have to wear these now at award shows," he joked. "It doesn't even cover your face."

The two were referencing the shocking moment at the Oscars broadcast when actor Will Smith slapped comedian Chris Rock. Grammy host Trevor Noah was also anticipated to touch on the controversy.

3:15 p.m.

Chick Corea and Vicente Fernandez have each won posthumous Grammys.

The jazz giant Corea, who died in February 2021, won two awards Sunday, for best improvised jazz solo and best Latin jazz album with Eliane Elias and Chucho Valdés.

The Mexican singer, actor and cultural icon Fernandez won best regional Mexican music album for "A Mis 80s."

Fernandez died in December at age 81.

Other posthumous Grammys are possible Sunday for Chris Cornell, who died five years ago and is nominated for best rock performance. And the Foo Fighters, who lost their drummer, Taylor Hawkins, just over a week ago are up for three Grammys.

2:35 p.m.

First the Oscar, now "Summer of Soul" has claimed Grammy glory.

The win for best music film Sunday came a week after "Summer of Soul's" Oscar moment was upended by Will Smith's slapping of Chris Rock. Director Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson briefly nodded to the Oscars slap, saying the film has been on a journey from the Sundance Film Festival "until ... last week," he said, laughing.

Questlove instead focused his speech on the artists featured in the film, naming many of them.

While winners at the Grammys Premiere Ceremony, where more than 70 awards are handed out, are generally limited to 45 seconds and one speaker, the four winners for "Summer of Soul" were able to

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 49 of 69

speak. (Mostly uninterrupted – the band started up after the second speaker, but quickly stopped.)

“Who’s having a better week than Questlove?” host LeVar Burton asked after the win. “Nobody!”

“Summer of Soul” tells the story of the mostly forgotten and unseen 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival, which featured performances by a young Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, Sly and the Family Stone, the 5th Dimension B.B. King and many others.

2:34 p.m.

Joni Mitchell has won a Grammy and made a rare appearance on the awards show stage to accept it.

Mitchell won best historical album on Sunday afternoon for “Joni Mitchell Archives – Vol. 1: The Early Years (1963–1967).”

The 78-year-old Mitchell needed a cane and help from an escort to get to the podium, but strutted and danced as she made her way up to accept her ninth career Grammy.

“Thanks to the academy for this nomination and this win, I didn’t expect this,” she said.

Along with her musical team, she thanked her physical therapist, whom she called “my angel.”

Mitchell had a brain aneurysm seven years ago that left her unable to speak or walk.

On Friday night, she was honored by the Recording Academy as the MusiCares person of the year, an award that honors a career of artistic achievement and philanthropy. John Legend, Brandi Carlile and Jon Batiste played her songs in tribute to her.

1:45 p.m.

TJ Osborne has given an emotional speech at the Grammy Awards after winning an award with his brother for their song “Younger Me.”

Osborne, who came out as gay last year, fought back tears as he reflected on the moment and the support he’s received. He noted that “Younger Me” was written in response to his coming out. The song won best performance by a country duo or group Sunday afternoon.

“I never thought that I would be able to do music professionally because of my sexuality. And I certainly never thought I would be here on the stage accepting a Grammy after having done something I felt like was going to be life changing and potentially in a very negative way,” Osborne said.

“And here I am tonight, not only accepting this Grammy Award with my brother, which I love so much, but I’m here with a man that I love and he loves me back.

“I don’t know what I did be so lucky.”

Osborne performs with his brother John as the Brothers Osborne.

The Brothers Osborne win came moments after Chris Stapleton won the Grammy for best country solo performance for a record third time. He took the trophy Sunday for his single “You Should Probably Leave.” He also won the award in 2018 and 2016.

1 p.m.

A project that turned “Bridgerton” into a musical has won a Grammy Award.

Emily Bear and Abigail Barlow won the best musical theater Grammy on Sunday afternoon for “The Unofficial Bridgerton Musical.”

They gleefully accepted the award, noting the project began a year ago by asking what “Bridgerton” would be like if it was a musical.

LeVar Burton presented them the honor during the Grammys Premiere Ceremony, where more than 70 awards are handed out.

Burton is doing double duty – he’s also nominated for best spoken word album.

3:45 a.m.

While John Legend was being honored for his musical achievements, the Grammy singer used the Recording Academy stage to pay homage to a Black music culture that shaped himself and the world.

Legend explained how Black music has set trends for worldwide listeners during the academy's Black Music Collective event, held Saturday night in Las Vegas. He was honored with the Global Impact Award for his personal and professional achievements in the music industry. Like Legend, the event was filled with empowering messages that touched on the importance of recognizing Black music creators, and featured a slew of popular performances.

3 a.m.

Several performers such as Billie Eilish, Olivia Rodrigo and Jon Batiste have a chance to carve their names in the Grammy history books Sunday.

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 ones to win three major categories – record, song and album of the year – twice.

Trevor Noah returns for a second time to host the show, which airs live in Las Vegas on CBS and Paramount+ beginning at 8 p.m. Eastern.

Police: At least 2 shooters kill 6, wound 12 in Sacramento

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif (AP) — At least two shooters opened fire early Sunday in Sacramento in the city's second mass shooting in five weeks, killing six people and wounding 12 others as bars closed for the night and crowds emptied onto downtown streets, police said.

Three men and three women were killed, Police Chief Kathy Lester said. Their bodies remained on the pavement hours after the gunfire erupted around 2 a.m. Police sought clues from a crime scene that stretched across multiple city blocks as they searched for the shooters.

At least four of the wounded were hospitalized with life-threatening injuries. Authorities have not offered a possible motive and have so far identified only one victim, 38-year-old Sergio Harris, without providing a cause of death.

His sister Kay Harris, 32, told The Associated Press just hours after the shooting that she had been asleep when a family member called to say they thought her brother had been killed. She said she thought Sergio Harris had been at the London nightclub, which is near the shooting.

Pamela Harris, Sergio Harris' mother, told The Sacramento Bee the family had not heard from him since the shooting.

"We just want to know what happened to him," she said early Sunday. "Not knowing anything is just hard to face."

Investigators pored through hundreds of pieces of evidence — much of it documented on the streets with blue and yellow markers — as officials begged the public to come forward with tips and videos that could help find the suspects.

Councilmember Katie Valenzuela, who represents the area, said she's fielded many phone calls reporting violence in her district during her 15 months in office. She cried at a news conference as she told reporters that the latest phone call woke her up at 2:30 a.m.

"I'm heartbroken and I'm outraged," she said. "Our community deserves better than this."

Sunday's violence was the third time this year in the U.S. that at least six people have been killed in a mass shooting, according to a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University.

President Joe Biden called for action on gun crimes in a statement Sunday.

"Today, America once again mourns for another community devastated by gun violence," Biden said. "But we must do more than mourn; we must act."

Sacramento has endured two mass shootings in the last five weeks. On Feb. 28, a father killed his three daughters, a chaperone and himself in a Sacramento church during a weekly supervised visitation. David

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 51 of 69

Mora, 39, was armed with a homemade semiautomatic rifle-style weapon, even though he was under a restraining order that prohibited him from possessing a firearm.

The area where Sunday's killings occurred is on the outskirts of the city's main entertainment district and has many bars and restaurants. It's anchored by the Golden One Center that attracts big-name concerts and is home to the NBA's Sacramento Kings. City officials have invested heavily in the area to promote development.

Videos on social media showed what appeared to be an altercation before the gunfire in California's capital city. Sgt. Zach Eaton, a police spokesperson, said investigators don't know if that fight led to the shooting.

Kelsey Schar was staying on the fourth floor of Citizen Hotel when she said she heard gunshots and saw flashes in the dark. She walked to the window and "saw a guy running and just shooting," Schar told the AP.

Her friend, Madalyn Woodard, said she saw a crowd in the street scatter amid the gunfire and a girl who appeared to have been shot in the arm lying on the ground. Security guards from a nearby nightclub rushed to help the girl with what looked like napkins to try to stanch the bleeding.

A video posted on Twitter showed people running through the street amid the sounds of rapid gunfire. Nightclubs close at 2 a.m. and it's typical for streets to be full of people at that hour in the city of about 525,000 people, located 75 miles (120 kilometers) northeast of San Francisco.

Pop duo Aly & AJ performed Saturday at Sacramento's Crest Theatre and their tour bus was caught in the gunfire, the musicians said on Twitter. No one in their touring group was hurt, the tweet said.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom said in a statement that his administration was working closely with law enforcement officials.

"What we do know at this point is that another mass casualty shooting has occurred, leaving families with lost loved ones, multiple individuals injured and a community in grief," he said.

Berry Accius, a community activist, said he came to the scene shortly after the shooting happened.

"The first thing I saw was like victims. I saw a young girl with a whole bunch of blood in her body, a girl taking off glass from her, a young girl screaming saying, 'They killed my sister.' A mother running up, 'Where's my son, has my son been shot?'" he said.

Mayor Darrell Steinberg said in recent years it "has been a very difficult time in downtown Sacramento," as the city's development efforts took a hit from the coronavirus pandemic.

He added that the shooting "gives pause to our entire community," but he urged people to continue visiting the area.

Staley leads South Carolina over UConn for second NCAA title

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Dawn Staley hoisted the championship trophy high, strutted around the court and stopped for a brief victory dance. She handed over the hardware to South Carolina's student band, then headed back to midcourt for more merriment.

The Gamecocks hit all the right notes this season, and they finished with a masterpiece.

Staley's team buttoned up on defense and dominated on the glass, beating UConn 64-49 on Sunday night to end the Huskies' undefeated streak in title games. Destanni Henderson scored a career-high 26 points, Aliyah Boston added 11 points and 16 rebounds, and the Gamecocks handed Geno Auriemma's Huskies their first loss in 12 NCAA title games.

"We played every possession like it was our last possession," said Staley, the first Black men's or women's coach with two Division I titles. "They were determined to be champions today."

A year ago, South Carolina lost in the Final Four when Boston missed a layup before the buzzer.

"Honestly, I've been thinking about this since last season. Everyone had a picture of me crying," said Boston, who was the Most Outstanding Player of the Final Four. "Today, we're national champions and I'm in tears."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 52 of 69

With Staley calling the shots in a Louis Vuitton letterman jacket, South Carolina took UConn to school on the boards and capped a wire-to-wire run as the No. 1 team in the country in The Associated Press poll. The Gamecocks also won the championship in 2017 with A'ja Wilson leading the way.

This time it was Boston — the AP Player of the Year — and her fellow South Carolina post players who dominated on the game's biggest stage. The Gamecocks outrebounded UConn 49-24, including a 21-6 advantage on offensive boards.

"We knew tonight that if we didn't hold our own on the boards, that it was going to be a really bad night for us," Auriemma said. "And that's exactly what happened."

They also clamped down on star Paige Bueckers and the Huskies on defense, just like they did all season long.

"They deserved it 100%," Auriemma said. "They were the best team all year."

It was South Carolina's night from the start. The Gamecocks (35-2) jumped to an 11-2 lead, grabbing nearly every rebound on both ends of the floor. They led to 22-8 after one quarter much to the delight of their fans, who made the trip to Minneapolis to be part of the sellout crowd.

UConn (30-6) trailed by 16 in the second quarter before Bueckers, a Minnesota native, got going. After having just one shot in the first quarter, she scored nine points in the second to get the Huskies within 35-27 at the half. She finished with 14.

An 8-2 run to start the third quarter put South Carolina up 43-29 before the Huskies finally started connecting from behind the arc. UConn missed its first eight 3-point attempts until Caroline Ducharme made one from the wing and Evina Westbrook followed with another to get the Huskies within 43-37.

That's as close as they could get because of Henderson.

The senior guard had a three-point play to close the third quarter and then had the team's first four points in the fourth to restore the double-digit lead. The Huskies couldn't recover.

"My teammates believed in me once again. We've been working so hard since Day 1, and it finally paid off, all my hard work, all my focus," Henderson said. "Me trusting the process. Me trusting God. She just put me in a position just to be great, and today, we national champions."

This was UConn's first trip to the championship game since 2016, when the Huskies won the last of four straight titles. Since then, the team has suffered heartbreaking defeats in the national semifinals, losing twice in overtime, before holding off Stanford on Friday night. The Huskies were trying to win their 12th title in the same city they won their first one in 1995.

Auriemma said Saturday that when his team had won each of its 11 titles, the Huskies entered the game as the better team. They certainly weren't on Sunday.

"We just didn't have enough," he said. "They were just too good for us."

It had been one of the most challenging seasons of Auriemma's Hall of Fame career. UConn overcame losing eight players for at least two games with injury or illness, including Bueckers, who missed nearly three months with a left knee injury suffered in early December. She came back in late February but wasn't at the same level that earned her AP Player of the Year as a freshman last season.

DEFENSE WINS CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Gamecocks have been stalwarts on defense all season long, ranking third nationally with 50.5 points allowed per game. They were even sharper in the NCAA Tournament, holding opponents to 44.8 points entering Sunday's finale.

Henderson had three steals, Boston blocked two shots and South Carolina forced 15 turnovers. The Gamecocks' plus-25 rebounding margin was the second biggest ever in a title game.

BIG PICTURE

UConn: The Huskies lose three seniors in Christyn Williams, Westbrook and Olivia Nelson-Ododa but still have a solid group back led by Bueckers and freshman Azzi Fudd. If the Huskies stay healthy, they'll have a good shot to contend for next year's title.

South Carolina: The Gamecocks lose Henderson and Victoria Saxton but have all the talent to repeat as champions.

'Fill the silence with your music,' Zelenskyy tells Grammys

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appeared in a video message at the Grammy Awards to ask for support in telling the story of Ukraine's invasion by Russia.

During the pre-recorded message that aired on the show Sunday, he likened the invasion to a deadly silence threatening to extinguish the dreams and lives of the Ukrainian people, including children.

"Our musicians wear body armor instead of tuxedos. They sing to the wounded in hospitals, even to those who can't hear them," he said in English. "But the music will break through anyway."

The Recording Academy, with its partner Global Citizen, prior to the ceremony highlighted a social media campaign called "Stand Up For Ukraine" to raise money and support during the humanitarian crisis.

"Fill the silence with your music. Fill it today to tell our story. Tell the truth about the war on your social networks, on TV, support us in any way you can any, but not silence. And then peace will come to all our cities," Zelenskyy said.

Following Zelenskyy's message, John Legend performed his song "Free" with Ukrainian musicians Siuzanna Iglidan and Mika Newton, and poet Lyuba Yakimchuk, as images from the war were shown on screens behind them.

The war in Ukraine had taken a particularly gruesome turn Sunday when Ukrainian forces entering the town of Bucha, recently held by Russian soldiers, found bodies of people who had been shot, some after being bound and tortured. Ukrainian authorities accused the Russians of war crimes, and European leaders called for tougher sanctions against Moscow. Russia said the atrocities had been committed by Ukrainians.

Serbia's populist president projected to win reelection

By JOVANA GEC and DUSAN STOJANOVIC Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) — Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and his populist right-wing party appeared headed to victory in Sunday's national election, extending a decade-long authoritarian rule in the Balkan country, according to early pollsters' projections.

The IPSOS and CESID pollsters, which have proven reliable in previous Serbian ballots, predicted Vucic would end up with nearly 60% of the votes. If confirmed in the official tally, Vucic would win outright a second five-year term as president and a runoff vote would not be needed.

Vucic later declared victory in both the presidential and parliamentary vote, saying he was proud to win the second outright mandate without going into a runoff.

"I huge thank you to the citizens of Serbia," he said, quoting similar results. "I'm endlessly proud and endlessly happy."

The pollsters projected that Vucic's Serbian Progressive Party would win the most votes in the parliamentary ballot, with around 43%, followed by the United for Victory of Serbia opposition group with around 13%.

Serbia's state election authorities said they would not make any official announcements on the vote count before Monday. The unprecedented move by the commission was branded as scandalous by opposition officials who said that it allowed Vucic to take over the state institution by giving him priority in announcing the official results.

Opposition claims of widespread irregularities marked the election Sunday. The governing populists have denied vote manipulation and pressure on voters.

Some 6.5 million voters were eligible to choose the president and a new parliament, and elections were being held as well for local authorities in the capital, Belgrade, and in over a dozen other towns and municipalities. Turnout was reported about 55% an hour before polls closed, higher than in most Serbian elections.

Opposition groups still stood a chance of winning in Belgrade, analysts said, which would deal a serious blow to Vucic's autocratic rule. The governing party is less popular in the capital due partly to a number of corruption-plagued construction projects that have devastated Belgrade's urban core.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 54 of 69

"These elections are the beginning of the end of Aleksandar Vucic," said Zdravko Ponos of the United for Victory of Serbia coalition who was running second in the presidential vote. "These elections triggered hope and we cannot betray that hope."

Ponos, a Western-educated former army chief of staff, had hoped to push Vucic into a second round in the presidential ballot.

Opposition groups said multiple irregularities were spotted during the voting. Opposition election controllers reported widespread ghost voting — voting under the names of people who are dead or don't exist — as well as ruling party activists offering money in exchange for votes.

One opposition leader was attacked outside Vucic's party offices in a Belgrade suburb, suffering facial injuries. A ruling party official was reportedly attacked in the central town of Nis.

Vucic, a former ultranationalist who has boasted of his close ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin, has sought to portray himself as a guarantor of stability amid the turmoil raging in Europe due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

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. Although Serbia is formally seeking entry into the 27-nation European Union, Vucic has fostered close ties with Russia and China, counting on the Serbs' resentment of the West over the 1999 NATO air war.

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

Vucic said the Ukrainian crisis influenced hugely the election in Serbia, shifting the already predominantly right-leaning nation further to the right. He said that after the election "Serbia will have to determine what it will do in the future."

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

Airlines cancel more than 3,500 US flights over weekend

By TALI ARBEL AP Technology Writer

Airlines have canceled more than 3,500 U.S. flights this weekend and delayed thousands more, citing weather in Florida and other issues.

FlightAware, a website that tracks flights, noted major disruptions at several Florida airports, including in Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, Tampa and Orlando, as well as Baltimore, New York and other airports around the country. JetBlue, Southwest, Alaska Airlines, Frontier, Spirit and American Airlines were most affected, according to FlightAware, with JetBlue and Spirit canceling one-third of Sunday's scheduled flights. Local news reported storms in Florida on Saturday. Several airlines said Sunday that operations are returning to normal.

The spate of cancellations arrived as air travel is rebounding from the pandemic, with strong demand for spring-break flights. People on social media complained about waiting on hold or in lines for hours to get their canceled flights rescheduled and being stranded for days.

"Severe weather in the Southeast and multiple air traffic control delay programs have created significant impacts on the industry," a JetBlue spokesperson said in an email. "Today's cancellations will help us reset our operation and safely move our crews and aircraft back in to position."

Southwest Airlines also cited "weather and airspace congestion" Saturday in Florida, as well as a "technology issue." It canceled about 1,000 flights over the weekend but said that as of 1 p.m. Eastern, it had no more cancellations on Sunday.

American said Florida weather Saturday affected its operations, and it was recovering today.

Alaska Airlines seemed to be dealing with a separate issue. The airline said Sunday that weekend flight cancellations that began Friday have affected more than 37,000 customers and, further cancellations were possible. The airline declined to say why it canceled flights, but referred in its statement to contract negotiations with its pilots. Off-duty pilots picketed in several U.S. cities Friday over stalled negotiations.

They have been without a new contract for three years.

"Alaska Airlines failed to properly plan for increased travel demand and take the steps necessary to ensure it attracted and retained pilots," the pilots union said in a Friday press release

Hungary's pro-Putin PM Orban claims victory in national vote

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Hungary's nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban declared victory in Sunday's national elections, claiming a mandate for a fourth term as a still incomplete vote count showed a strong lead for his right-wing party.

In a 10-minute speech to Fidesz party officials and supporters at an election night event in Budapest, Orban addressed a crowd cheering "Viktor!" and declared it was a "huge victory" for his party.

"We won a victory so big that you can see it from the moon, and you can certainly see it from Brussels," said Orban, who has often been condemned by the European Union for overseeing democratic backsliding and alleged corruption.

While votes were still being tallied, it appeared clear that the question was not whether Orban's Fidesz party would take the election, but by how much.

With around 91% of votes tallied, Orban's Fidesz-led coalition had won 53%, while a pro-European opposition coalition, United for Hungary, had just over 34%, according to the National Election Office.

It appeared possible that Fidesz would win another constitutional majority, allowing it to continue making deep unilateral changes to the Central European nation.

"The whole world has seen tonight in Budapest that Christian democratic politics, conservative civic politics and patriotic politics have won. We are telling Europe that this is not the past, this is the future," Orban said.

As Fidesz party officials gathered at an election night event on the Danube river in Budapest, state secretary Zoltan Kovacs pointed to the participation of so many parties in the election as a testament to the strength of Hungary's democracy.

"We have heard a lot of nonsense recently about whether there is democracy in Hungary," Kovacs said. "Hungarian democracy in the last 12 years has not weakened, but been strengthened."

The contest had been expected to be the closest since Orban took power in 2010, thanks to Hungary's six main opposition parties putting aside their ideological differences to form a united front against Fidesz. Voters were electing lawmakers to the country's 199-seat parliament.

Yet even in his home district, opposition leader Peter Marki-Zay trailed the longtime Fidesz incumbent Janos Lazar by more than 12 points, with more than 98% of the votes counted there. It was a discouraging sign for the prime ministerial candidate who had promised to end to what he alleges is rampant government corruption, raise living standards by increasing funding to Hungary's ailing health care and schools and mend frayed relations with the country's Western partners.

In a surprise performance, radical right-wing party Our Homeland Movement appeared to have garnered more than 6% of the vote, exceeding the 5% threshold needed to gain seats in parliament.

Opposition parties and international observers have noted structural impediments to defeating Orban, highlighting pervasive pro-government bias in the public media, the domination of commercial news outlets by Orban allies and a heavily gerrymandered electoral map.

Edit Zgut, a political scientist at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, predicted that a clear victory for Orban would allow him to move further in an autocratic direction, sidelining dissidents and capturing new areas of the economy.

"Hungary seems to have reached a point of no return," she said. "The key lesson is that the playing field is tilted so much that it became almost impossible to replace Fidesz in elections."

The opposition coalition, United For Hungary, asked voters to support a new political culture based on pluralistic governance and mended alliances with the country's EU and NATO allies.

Speaking to supporters in Budapest late Sunday, Marki-Zay conceded defeat but argued that Fidesz had

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 56 of 69

won under a system of its own making.

"We never thought this would be the result. We knew in advance that it would be an extremely unequal fight," Marki-Zay said. "We do not dispute that Fidesz won this election. That this election was democratic and free is, of course, something we continue to dispute."

While Orbán had earlier campaigned on divisive social and cultural issues, he dramatically shifted the tone of his campaign after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, and has portrayed the election since then as a choice between peace and stability or war and chaos.

While the opposition called for Hungary to support its embattled neighbor and act in lockstep with its EU and NATO partners, Orbán, a longtime ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, has insisted that Hungary remain neutral and maintain its close economic ties with Moscow, including continuing to import Russian gas and oil on favorable terms.

At his final campaign rally Friday, Orbán claimed that supplying Ukraine with weapons — something that Hungary, alone among Ukraine's EU neighbors, has refused to do — would make the country a military target, and that sanctioning Russian energy imports would cripple Hungary's own economy.

"This isn't our war, we have to stay out of it," Orbán said.

The president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, on Saturday 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.

While speaking to supporters on Sunday, Orbán singled out Zelenskyy as part of the "overwhelming force" that he said his party had struggled against in the election — "the left at home, the international left all around, the Brussels bureaucrats, the Soros empire with all its money, the international mainstream media, and in the end, even the Ukrainian president."

Orbán — a fierce critic of immigration, LGBTQ rights and "EU bureaucrats" — has garnered the admiration of right-wing nationalists across Europe and North America. He has taken many of Hungary's democratic institutions under his control and depicted himself as a defender of European Christendom against Muslim migrants, progressives and the "LGBTQ lobby."

Along with the election to parliament, a referendum on LGBTQ issues was being held Sunday. The questions pertained to sex education programs in schools and the availability to children of information about sex reassignment.

The Organization For Security and Cooperation in Europe sent a full observation mission to Hungary to monitor Sunday's election, only the second time it has done so in a European Union country.

Mixed results for Oregon's pioneering drug decriminalization

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Oregon voters approved a ballot measure in 2020 to decriminalize hard drugs after being told it was a way to establish and fund addiction recovery centers that would offer people aid instead of incarceration.

Yet in the first year after the new approach took effect in February 2021, only 1% of people who received citations for possessing controlled substances asked for help via a new hotline.

With Oregon being the first state in America to decriminalize possession of personal-use amounts of heroin, methamphetamine, LSD, oxycodone and other drugs, its program is being watched as a potential model for other states.

Some are questioning whether the approach is proving too lenient, but others say the new system has already had a positive impact by redirecting millions of dollars into facilities to help those with drug dependency issues. The funds come from taxes generated by Oregon's legal marijuana industry and savings from reductions in arrests, jail time and probation supervision.

Under Ballot Measure 110, possession of controlled substances is now a newly created Class E "violation," instead of a felony or misdemeanor. It carries a maximum \$100 fine, which can be waived if the person

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 57 of 69

calls a hotline for a health assessment. The call can lead to addiction counseling and other services.

But out of roughly 2,000 citations issued by police in the year after decriminalization took effect, only 92 of the people who received them called the hotline by mid-February. And only 19 requested resources for services, said William Nunemann of Lines for Life, which runs the hotline.

Almost half of those who got citations failed to show up in court.

State health officials have reported 473 unintentional opioid overdose deaths from January to August 2021, the most recent month for which statistics are available, with the vast majority of those occurring after decriminalization took effect. That narrowly surpasses the total for all of 2020, and is nearly 200 deaths more than the state saw in all of 2019. The state reports that opioid overdose visits to emergency rooms and urgent care centers have also been on the rise.

The Oregon Health Authority cites as possible reasons the greater presence of fentanyl, which has increased overdose deaths across the country, as well as a downturn in reporting during the pandemic in 2020.

Sen. Floyd Prozanski, chair of the Oregon Senate's Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation Committee, said he's surprised more of those ticketed weren't taking advantage of the recovery options. Still, he believes it's too early to judge how the new approach is going.

"It's a different model, at least for the U.S.," Prozanski said, adding he'd want to wait at least another half-year before considering whether steps should be introduced to compel people to seek treatment.

Decriminalization advocates argued putting drug users in jail and giving them criminal records, which harms job and housing prospects, was not working.

"Punishing people and these punitive actions, all it does is saddle them with barriers and more stigma and more shame," said Tera Hurst, executive director of Oregon Health Justice Recovery Alliance, which represents more than 75 community-based organizations and is focused on implementing Measure 110.

The Drug Policy Alliance spearheaded Oregon's ballot measure. With no U.S. states to serve as examples, the New York-based group, which calls itself the leading organization in the U.S. promoting alternatives to the war on drugs, studied Portugal, which decriminalized drug possession in 2000.

Portugal's approach is more vigorous than Oregon's in getting people to treatment.

There, "dissuasion commissions" pressure anyone caught using drugs — even marijuana — to seek treatment. Those pressure points include fines, prohibiting drug users from visiting certain venues or from traveling abroad, seizure of personal property, community work and having to periodically report to health services or other places.

Drug Policy Alliance intentionally sought an approach that did not compel people to seek treatment, said spokesperson Matt Sutton.

"We have seen that when people voluntarily access services when they are ready, they have much more successful outcomes," Sutton said.

Some 16,000 people accessed services through the ballot measure's "Access to Care" grants in the first year of decriminalization, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

Most — 60% — accessed "harm reduction services," like syringe exchanges and overdose medications, the health authority said. Another 15% were assisted with housing needs and 12% obtained peer support. Only 0.85% entered treatment.

Critics say that's simply not enough.

"The Oregon ballot initiative was presented to the public as pro-treatment but it has been a complete failure in that regard," said Keith Humphreys, an addiction researcher and professor of psychiatry at Stanford University and former senior adviser in the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Brian Pacheco of the Drug Policy Alliance, though, said people with drug problems need a range of options, including harm reduction services, housing assistance, peer support and, for those who can't get insurance or Medicaid, access to treatment centers.

"Measure 110 funding has strengthened organizations in myriad ways, including getting mobile vehicles to provide services in communities, helped programs keep their doors open, and aided other organizations to purchase and distribute Naloxone (which reverses opioid overdose)," Pacheco said in an email.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 58 of 69

The \$31 million in grants distributed so far paid for thousands of doses of naloxone, thousands of syringe exchanges, recovery housing, vehicles and the hiring of dozens of staffers for care centers, including recovery mentors, according to the health authority.

An example of where some of the money is going is Great Circle, a nonresidential treatment center in Salem owned by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, which was awarded a \$590,055 grant.

On a recent day, two Salem police officers checked on a homeless woman who had been assaulted days earlier. Still bearing a black eye, she confided she had a drug problem and needed help. Police Lt. Treven Upkes called Great Circle to see if they could help. Bring her right over, he was told.

"Just the fact that they had an open door for us at the moment that someone was saying they were ready for help, that's such an incredible step for us," Upkes said. "That's the kind of thing that we would hope comes out of Measure 110."

If the response had been to schedule an appointment two weeks down the road, Upkes noted he might have been unable to reconnect with the woman.

At Great Circle, a staff doctor and nurses check a person's vital signs and do a urinalysis with an in-house lab. A nurse dispenses doses of methadone, which can relieve terrible "dope sick" symptoms a person in opioid withdrawal experiences.

Peer specialists like Nick Mull describe their own life experiences to those with substance abuse disorders, and inspire them. Mull's parents were addicts and he fell into drug use himself at a young age.

"About six years ago, I got in some trouble and ... I started to want to change my life," said Mull, wearing a black hoodie and jeans. "So I just started doing treatment, more treatment and more treatment. I learned a lot."

Jennifer Worth, Great Circle's operations director, said Mull plays an important role.

"What Nick brings to the work is a sense of hope," Worth said. "And the patients who are struggling with where he was can see that hope is possible."

But with so few people seeking help after receiving citations, the Legislature might need to consider requiring they do more than call a hotline or pay a small fine, Prozanski said.

Humphreys believes people should be pressured to seek treatment if they're committing crimes like shoplifting and burglary, but not if they're simply using drugs.

"It's about the threats to public safety that some people pose because of their problematic drug use," Humphreys said. "And in those cases, pressuring people to seek treatment is absolutely legitimate."

Oregon Secretary of State Shemia Fagan's office will be auditing Oregon's program. Fagan said she has a personal interest: Her own mother had a lifelong battle with addiction and homelessness.

Man in Germany gets 90 COVID-19 shots to sell forged passes

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — A 60-year-old man allegedly had himself vaccinated against COVID-19 dozens of times in Germany in order to sell forged vaccination cards with real vaccine batch numbers to people not wanting to get vaccinated themselves.

The man from the eastern Germany city of Magdeburg, whose name was not released in line with German privacy rules, is said to have received up to 90 shots against COVID-19 at vaccination centers in the eastern state of Saxony for months until criminal police caught him this month, the German news agency dpa reported Sunday.

The suspect was not detained but is under investigation for unauthorized issuance of vaccination cards and document forgery, dpa reported.

He was caught at a vaccination center in Eilenburg in Saxony when he showed up for a COVID-19 shot for the second day in a row. Police confiscated several blank vaccination cards from him and initiated criminal proceedings.

It was not immediately clear what impact the approximately 90 shots of COVID-19 vaccines, which were from different brands, had on the man's personal health.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 59 of 69

German police have conducted many raids in connection with forgery of vaccination passports in recent months. Many COVID-19 deniers refuse to get vaccinated in Germany, but at the same time want to have the coveted COVID-19 passports that make access to public life and venues such as restaurants, theaters, swimming pools or workplaces much easier.

Germany has seen high infection numbers for weeks, yet many measures to rein in the pandemic ended on Friday. Donning masks is no longer compulsory in grocery stores and most theaters but it is still mandatory on public transportation.

In most schools in Germany, students also no longer have to wear masks, which has led teachers' associations to warn of possible conflicts in class.

"There is now a danger that, on the one hand, children who wear masks will be teased by classmates as wimps and overprotective or, on the other hand, pressure will be exerted on non-mask wearers," Heinz-Peter Meidinger, the president of the German Teachers' Association, told dpa. He advocated a voluntary commitment by teachers and students to continue wearing masks in class and on school grounds, at least until the country goes on a two-week Easter holiday..

Health experts say the most recent surge of infections in Germany — triggered by the BA.2 omicron subvariant— may have peaked.

On Sunday, the country's disease control agency reported 74,053 new COVID-19 infections in one day, while less than a week ago it reported 111,224 daily infections.

Overall, Germany has registered 130,029 COVID-19 deaths.

Pope prays for end to 'sacrilegious' war, refugee welcome

By NICOLE WINFIELD and LUIGI NAVARRA Associated Press

VALLETTA, Malta (AP) — Pope Francis prayed Sunday for an end to the "sacrilegious" war in Ukraine and for the world to show compassion to refugees as he concluded a two-day visit to Malta that was dominated by his concern for the devastation unleashed by Russia's invasion.

"May we be tireless in praying and in offering assistance to those who suffer," Francis said at the end of a Mass in Valletta, the capital of Malta, that drew 20,000 people, some of them waiving Ukrainian flags.

More Ukrainian flags greeted him outside a migrant shelter, where Ukrainian protesters shouted "Save our children!" and "Close the sky over Ukraine!"

Francis has used his two-day visit to Malta to drive home his call for Europe to show compassion to would-be refugees who cross the Mediterranean Sea from Libya. He has expanded that message to express his gratitude for the welcome Europe has shown Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Russian war and his hope that same generosity could be extended to others.

Though short, the trip has been particularly taxing for the 85-year-old pontiff, who is suffering from a chronic strained ligament in his right knee. He struggled repeatedly Sunday to get out of his chair and his limping gait from sciatica was so pronounced that he frequently had to grab the arm of an aide.

Francis opened his second and final day in Malta by visiting the Grotto of St. Paul in Rabat, where the Apostle Paul stayed after being shipwrecked off Malta en route to Rome in AD 60. According to the biblical account of the period, the Maltese people showed Paul unusual kindness, and he responded by preaching and healing, bringing Christianity to the islands.

Francis referred to that warm welcome Malta showed Christ's shipwrecked disciple, meeting with recent migrants from Africa who paid smugglers to try to reach Europe to escape war and conflict. He told them that they "could be any one of us."

"It is my hope that that is how Malta will always treat those who land on its shores, offering them a genuinely 'safe harbor,'" he said.

Malta has long been at the heart of the European debate over refugee policy. The country of a half-million is frequently criticized by humanitarian groups for refusing to let rescue ships dock at its ports. The government argues it has one of the EU's highest rates in processing first-time asylum applications relative to the population, and says other, bigger European countries should do more to shoulder the burden.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 60 of 69

Just this week, a German aid group urged Malta to take in 106 migrants rescued off Libya. Malta demurred and on Saturday, the mayor of Palermo, Sicily, said the city was ready to welcome them.

While Francis has praised Malta's response overall, some migrants at the Peace Lab social service center said they had been waiting for years for their asylum claims to be processed and that Malta really doesn't work to integrate them.

"I need an ID card," said Agyei Kwasi Batig, a Ghanaian who has been living in Malta for eight years. "In Europe, if you don't have an ID card, you suffer. For everything, you need documents."

Francis' Mass, his biggest event in Malta, drew an estimated 20,000 people. They clapped when Francis urged the faithful in a final prayer to "think of the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in the martyred Ukraine, which continues to be bombarded in this sacrilegious war."

Among those in the crowd 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, leaving behind her parents, who are both doctors.

An Orthodox Christian, she said she was attending the Mass to accompany the Maltese host family who took her in after a solo train and bus journey that took her to Poland, Germany and the Netherlands before she flew to Malta. Carrying Ukrainian and Vatican flags, Shcherbyna said she wanted to ask the pope and the world for prayers for Ukraine, saying she still cannot believe what has happened in just a few weeks.

"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. We thought it had ended in 1945 and that was it. But now, it's really shocking for all of us," she said.

Another Ukrainian Orthodox in the crowd, Margaryta Gromova, fled recently from Kyiv and thanked Francis for speaking out.

"He can really speak about this issue, he can pray for us," she said. "We can feel the unity with other people, local people, the world, because we need support, like moral support, and all the support from God now."

Taliban clamp down on drugs, announce ban on poppy harvest

By KATHY GANNON and MOHAMMAD SHOAI B AMIN Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan's ruling Taliban on Sunday announced a ban on harvesting poppies, even as farmers in some parts of the country began extracting the opium from the plant that is needed for making heroin.

The Taliban warned farmers that their crops will be burned and that they can be jailed if they proceed with the harvest. The harvest and planting seasons vary across Afghanistan. In the Taliban heartland of southern Kandahar the harvesting has begun but in the east of the country some farmers are just beginning to plant their crop.

In desperately poor Afghanistan the ban seems certain to further impoverish its poorest citizens at a time when the country is in an economic free fall.

The decree was announced by Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid at a news conference in the capital of Kabul. The order also outlawed the manufacturing of narcotics and the transportation, trade, export and import of heroin, hashish and alcohol.

The ban is reminiscent of the previous Taliban rule in the late 1990s when the movement espousing a harsh interpretation of Islam outlawed poppy production. At that time, the ban was implemented countrywide within two years, and according to the U.N. largely helped eradicate poppy production.

However, after the ouster of the Taliban in 2001, farmers in many parts of the country returned to poppy production. Poppies are the main source of income for millions of small farmers and day laborers who can earn upwards of \$300 a month harvesting them and extracting the opium.

Today, Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium, despite billions of dollars spent by the international community during its 20 years in Afghanistan to eradicate the drug. In 2021, before the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan produced more than 6,000 tons of opium, which the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime said could potentially yield 320 tons of pure heroin.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 61 of 69

Afghanistan produces more opium than all opium-producing countries combined and last year was the sixth straight year of record opium harvests.

During the years-long Taliban insurgency, the movement reportedly made millions of dollars taxing farmers and middle men to move their drugs outside Afghanistan. Senior officials of the U.S.-backed government also reportedly made millions on the flourishing drug trade.

Washington spent more than \$8 billion trying to eradicate poppy production in Afghanistan during its nearly 20-year war, which ended with the Taliban takeover of the country in August.

Nearly 80% of heroin produced from Afghan opium reaches Europe through Central Asia and Pakistan. According to a U.N. report in 2021, income from opiates in Afghanistan was between \$1.8 billion and \$2.7 billion, more than 7% of the country's GDP. The same report said "illicit drug supply chains outside Afghanistan" make much more.

The Taliban's ban comes as the country faces a humanitarian crisis that spurred the U.N. to ask for \$4.4 billion last month as 95% of Afghans do not have enough to eat.

The ban, while hitting drug production houses hard, will likely devastate small farmers who rely on opium production to survive. It's difficult to know how the Taliban will be able to create substitute crops and financing for farmers, at a time when international development money has stopped.

Afghanistan's poorest often use the promise of the next year's poppy harvest to buy staples such as flour, sugar, cooking oil and heating oil.

When the Taliban last ruled, they employed village elders and mosque clerics to enforce the ban. In villages that ignored the ban, the Taliban arrested the elders, clerics and offending farmers.

Across US, faith groups mobilize to aid Ukrainian refugees

By DEEPA BHARATH and LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — As U.S. refugee resettlement agencies and nonprofits nationwide gear up to help Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion and war that has raged for nearly six weeks, members of faith communities have been leading the charge to welcome the displaced.

In Southern California, pastors and lay individuals are stationing themselves at the Mexico border waving Ukrainian flags and offering food, water and prayer. Around the country, other religious groups are getting ready to provide longer-term support for refugees who will have to find housing, work, health care and schooling.

Aaron Szloboda, an assistant pastor at the Christian church Calvary San Diego, recently spent 50 hours straight at the Mexican border handing out food and water to Ukrainians lined up to enter the United States.

Just 10 minutes from the frontier, Calvary San Diego has become something of a hub for newly arrived refugees, a place where they can recuperate after a harrowing journey and plan their next steps.

On Friday its walls were lined with snacks, beverages, dolls and stuffed animals as families arrived clutching duffel bags, suitcases and the hands of small children. They were welcomed inside to rest, eat a meal and check their phones. Volunteers helped them navigate their immediate individual needs: information on flights to New York; how to change euros to dollars; a ride for a friend who had just walked across the border.

Szloboda, whose Hungarian Jewish grandfather survived the Holocaust and lost family members to Nazi genocide, believes he is being called to serve those in dire need: "They're exhausted physically and mentally."

The U.S. has agreed to accept up to 100,000 refugees from Ukraine, which has experienced a flight of more than 4 million people since late February. The Biden administration is also expected to end pandemic-related asylum limits at the U.S.-Mexico border on May 23, caps that have drawn criticism from immigration advocates.

But even before such refugee resettlements begin, faith-based groups have already been helping Ukrainians who have made their way to the United States. Some arrived directly on travel visas. Others traveled to Mexico and then to the U.S. border to claim asylum, enabling them to stay in the U.S. while

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 62 of 69

their cases are processed.

Refugee resettlement agencies can use all the help they can get to accommodate the influx. Deep cuts during the Trump administration led them to slash staffing and programming, and they have already been scrambling to help tens of thousands of Afghans seeking asylum after fleeing last year's Taliban takeover.

"We've started dealing with these crises before there has been a chance to rebuild that infrastructure," said Stephanie Nawyn, associate professor of sociology at Michigan State University who focuses on refugee issues.

"Refugees have a lot of needs — homes, jobs, English classes, financial assistance, schools and translators who will help them navigate all of that. That's too much even for a large organization," Nawyn said. "While getting more people of faith to help is great, not having enough resources or case managers is still going to be a problem."

Swiftly providing those kinds of protections and benefits to Ukrainian arrivals is a religious imperative, said Mark Hetfield, president and CEO of the Jewish refugee agency HIAS, one of nine groups that contract with the U.S. State Department on resettlement.

Jewish people are called by their faith to care for and help people in need, Hetfield said, noting that "welcoming the stranger" is mentioned 36 times in the Torah, more often than any other commandment.

"Not because it's the most important but because it's the easiest one to forget or ignore — to love the stranger as yourself," Hetfield said.

HIAS is also welcoming interfaith efforts to help newly arriving refugees, such as one planned partnership in New York City with Buddhist groups.

Columbia University doctoral student Chad DeChant, who belongs to Village Zendo, a Zen community in lower Manhattan, initiated that effort. The group is forming committees to help refugees navigate social services, and once their application to HIAS is approved, they hope volunteers can get trained by the resettlement agency.

Buddhism teaches its adherents to be aware of "the interdependence of all beings," DeChant said, and "the teaching is to not see ourselves as separate from others: Acting compassionately to help others is a core value in all Buddhist traditions."

Minda Schweizer, founder and executive director of Home for Refugees, a Christian nonprofit based in Orange County, California, said resources are sorely needed at the local level where faith-based groups continue helping Afghan refugees who are still finding their way.

"Many Afghan refugees are still in motels because we're in the midst of a housing crisis," Schweizer said.

Matthew Soerens, the U.S. director of church mobilization and advocacy at World Relief, said his organization is eager to welcome more Ukrainians and he has been busy fielding queries from churches about ways to help: Can they host a family? Can they be involved with English tutoring?

"One of our big asks of churches is, 'Can you help us identify landlords or property managers?'" Soerens said. "What we are really struggling with almost everywhere in the country is long-term, permanent, affordable housing."

Meanwhile, as Ukrainians keep arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border, local churches continue to step up.

Bogdan Kipko, pastor at Forward Church, a Baptist congregation in Irvine, California, has been working with churches such as Calvary as well as one Russian church in the San Diego area. Volunteers have been taking refugees to nearby hotels or hosting them in their own homes; after a short stay, those with relatives in the country typically then travel by bus, car or plane to places like Sacramento, where there is a large Ukrainian community.

The bigger challenge will be to connect those in need with long-term services and help them build new lives, Kipko said: "We're trying to help those who have no place to go. We're thinking about their long-term needs."

Kipko and his family arrived in the United States in 1992 after fleeing religious persecution in Kazakhstan, and many of his relatives hail from Ukraine.

"We came here as refugees, and Baptist churches in Washington helped us get on our feet," he said. "I'll never forget that."

Battle heats up over remaining federal rental assistance

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

In her office at a nonprofit in central Nebraska, Karen Rathke routinely encounters residents still stung by the pandemic and hoping to get help with their rent.

Rathke, president of the Heartland United Way, was hoping to tap into an additional \$120 million in federal Emergency Rental Assistance to help them. But that money, part of what's known as ERA2, is at risk after Republican Gov. Pete Ricketts said he doesn't want it.

Many other states have in recent months returned tens of millions of dollars in unused rental assistance because they have so few renters — but only Nebraska has flat out refused the aid.

"I'm very concerned about not having anything," Rathke said of the federal money, which can be allocated over the next three years for everything from rent to services preventing eviction to affordable housing activities.

"All these nonprofits, when people come to them asking for help, the bucket will be empty," she said. "It is hard to tell people no, to tell people that we don't have the funds to help them."

The debate is playing out across the country as the Treasury Department begins reallocating some of the \$46.5 billion in rental assistance from places slow to spend to others that are running out of funds.

States and localities have until September to spend their share of the first \$25 billion allocated, known as ERA1, and the second \$21.55 billion, known as ERA2, by 2025. So far, Treasury says \$30 billion has been spent or allocated through February.

Treasury announced earlier this month that over \$1 billion of ERA1 funds would be moved, for a total of \$2.3 billion reallocated this year. Larger states like California, New York, New Jersey and Texas are getting hundreds of millions of dollars in additional money. Native American tribes, including the Oglala Sioux Lakota in South Dakota and Chippewa Cree in Montana, are also receiving tens of millions of dollars in additional help.

Those losing money are almost all smaller Republican states with large rural populations and fewer renters. Many were slow to spend their share as required by program rules, so they either voluntarily returned money or had it taken. Some, like South Dakota, Wyoming and New Hampshire, unsuccessfully pitched to use the money for other things like affordable housing.

Treasury officials, housing advocates and many Republican governors argue there is still plenty of money to help renters in these states and that the reallocation gets money where it's most needed. Montana, for example, returned \$54.6 million but still has \$224.5 million. West Virginia returned more than \$42.4 million but still has \$224.7 million, according to Treasury.

"We are trying to reallocate the best we can," said Gene Sperling, who is charged with overseeing implementation of President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus rescue package. "This is a balancing act, but one that is rooted in commitment to getting the most funds to the most people in need as possible."

North Dakota returned \$150 million of its \$352 million, saying it couldn't effectively spend all the money by the deadline. The state believes the remaining funds are sufficient to meet the needs of those who are eligible.

Some Democratic lawmakers disagree.

"Outrageous and unacceptable: turning back rental assistance funds when applications are piling up and people are being evicted," tweeted Democratic Rep. Karla Rose Hanson, of Fargo.

South Dakota was forced to return more than \$81 million — though more than \$9 million went to Native American tribes in the state. Gov. Kristi Noem suggested the money was not necessary, adding: "Our renters enjoy something even better than government hand-outs: a job."

But Democratic Sen. Reynold Nesiba said there was a lack of awareness about the rental assistance and criticized the state for not doing more to promote it. He pointed to a \$5 million tourism advertising campaign that was paid for with coronavirus relief funds and questioned why that level of promotion didn't happen for pandemic relief programs.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 64 of 69

Meanwhile, organizations that are helping administer the rental assistance still available expect a continued need. The state has long faced a run on affordable housing, which has only been exacerbated during the pandemic.

"Housing costs are just too high," said Sandy Miller, who coordinates the rental assistance program for an organization called Community Action in the western half of South Dakota. "It's harder for them to get in a home, it's harder for them to stay in their home."

Several states argued the reallocation addresses a flaw in the program, which created a funding formula based on population, not the number of renters in a state.

"Congress ... did not take into consideration Wyoming's small population, income levels, actual renters' needs, and that the majority of Wyoming households — 70% — are owner occupied," said Rachel Girt, the state's rental assistance communication coordinator, after the state returned \$164 million out of \$352 million. Another \$2.8 million was shifted to the Northern Arapaho Tribal Housing Program and Eastern Shoshone Housing Authority.

Josh Hanford, commissioner of the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, noted that the \$352 million it received far surpassed the \$25 million given to Memphis, which has a similar population.

"As long as we're able to serve all our eligible households, hopefully folks will see that there is greater need in other parts of the country that have received a lot less assistance per household," Hanford said when asked about the state returning \$31 million.

In Nebraska, the loss of funds is projected to hit rural areas hardest.

The state program already reallocated \$85 million of its \$158 million in ERA1 to its biggest cities of Omaha and Lincoln and their respective counties. It still has nearly \$30 million. Without the additional \$120 million in ERA2 money, an analysis by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Center on Children, Families and the Law found that tenants in Omaha and Lincoln will still have help after September, but those in other counties will not.

Ricketts, the Nebraska governor, defended the decision not to take the additional money.

The state "has received and distributed an unprecedented amount of federal funding to help Nebraskans weather the storm over these past two years," he wrote in an opinion column. "But at a certain point, we must acknowledge that the storm has passed and get back to the Nebraska Way. We must guard against becoming a welfare state where people are incentivized not to work and encouraged to rely on government handouts well after an emergency is over."

But housing advocates say his decision will leave many vulnerable tenants without a lifeline. Tenants in rural areas often have access to fewer resources, including affordable housing, internet access and reliable transport.

Lawmakers passed a bill last month requiring the state to apply for the money. But Ricketts vetoed the bill, saying the state "must guard against big government socialism." If lawmakers don't override his veto, the money is likely to be reallocated by Treasury to other states.

"We know from communities across Nebraska that the need is not only there, but is fairly severe," said Erin Feichtinger, director of policy and advocacy for the social service agency Together.

"There is really no good reason to pass up these funds. It's money that is allocated to Nebraskans," she said. "Nothing bad will happen if we accept this funding, but lots of bad things can if we don't."

COVID-19 temporarily stops Daniel Craig's return to Broadway

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Could it be the curse of the Scottish play? Daniel Craig's return to Broadway in a new version of "Macbeth" has been temporarily halted after the actor contracted COVID-19.

Wednesday's matinee and evening performances were canceled when the James Bond actor tested positive. In a tweet late Saturday night, the show said all performances were canceled through Thursday "due to the detection of a limited number of positive covid test results within the company."

Craig stars in a revival of Williams Shakespeare's tragedy, with Ruth Negga making her Broadway debut

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 65 of 69

playing Lady Macbeth.

"Macbeth" is playing the Lyceum Theatre, with an opening set for April 28. Tony Award-winner Sam Gold is directing.

According to folklore, "Macbeth" was cursed from the beginning, when a coven of witches objected to Shakespeare using real incantations and put a curse on the play. Other productions have been plagued with accidents.

Craig was last on Broadway in a 2013 revival of Harold Pinter's "Betrayal" opposite his wife, Rachel Weisz, and directed by Mike Nichols. Craig also starred opposite Hugh Jackman in 2009's "A Steady Rain." Gold directed Craig in a 2016 off-Broadway production of "Othello" alongside David Oyelowo.

Other high-profile shows on Broadway have had to cancel shows due to their lead actor's contracting the virus, including both "The Music Man" leads, Hugh Jackman and Sutton Foster.

Lithuania cuts off Russian gas imports, urges EU to do same

By LIUDAS DAPKUS Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania (AP) — Lithuania says it has cut itself off entirely of gas imports from Russia, apparently becoming the first of the European Union's 27 nations using Russian gas to break its energy dependence upon Moscow.

"Seeking full energy independence from Russian gas, in response to Russia's energy blackmail in Europe and the war in Ukraine, Lithuania has completely abandoned Russian gas," Lithuania's energy ministry said in a statement late Saturday, adding that the measure took effect in the beginning of April.

Lithuania managed to reduce imports of Russian gas to zero on Saturday, a move seen a milestone in achieving energy independence in the former Soviet republic of 2.8 million, the ministry said.

"We are the first EU country among Gazprom's supply countries to gain independence from Russian gas supplies, and this is the result of a multi-year coherent energy policy and timely infrastructure decisions," Minister of Energy Dainius Kreivys said.

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda posted an upbeat tweet on his account and urged other European nations to do the same.

"From this month on — no more Russian gas in Lithuania. Years ago, my country made decisions that today allow us with no pain to break energy ties with the aggressor. If we can do it, the rest of Europe can do it too!" Nausėda tweeted.

In 2015, nearly 100% of Lithuania's gas supplies derived from imports of Russian gas but the situation has changed drastically over the past years after the country built an off-shore LNG import terminal, launched in 2014, in the port city of Klaipėda.

The energy ministry said from now on all gas for Lithuania's domestic consumption would be imported via Klaipėda's LNG terminal.

Last year, some 26% of Lithuania's gas supplies derived from deliveries from a Russian gas pipeline while 62% came via Klaipėda's LNG terminal and the remaining 12% were imported from a gas storage in neighboring Latvia.

Baltic neighbors Latvia and Estonia are also heavily dependent on Russian gas but the operator of Latvia's natural gas storage said none of the three Baltic states were importing Russian gas as of April 2.

Uldis Bariss, the CEO of Conexus Baltic Grid, told Latvian media on Saturday that the Baltic gas market was currently being served by gas reserves stored underground in Latvia.

Last month, Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte said Klaipėda's LNG terminal wouldn't have enough capacity to provide gas for all the three Baltic countries.

As a solution, Estonia's government has proposed building a LNG terminal jointly with Latvia and Nordic neighbor Finland in the Estonian port town of Paldiski, which is not far from the capital, Tallinn.

States look for solutions as US fentanyl deaths keep rising

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 66 of 69

As the addiction and overdose crisis that has gripped the U.S. for two decades turns even deadlier, state governments are scrambling for ways to stem the destruction wrought by fentanyl and other synthetic opioids.

In statehouses across the country, lawmakers have been considering and adopting laws on two fronts: reducing the risk to users and increasing the penalties for dealing fentanyl or mixing it with other drugs. Meanwhile, Republican state attorneys general are calling for more federal action, while some GOP governors are deploying National Guard units with a mission that includes stopping the flow of fentanyl from Mexico.

"It's a fine line to help people and try to get people clean, and at the same time incarcerate and get the drug dealers off the streets," said Nathan Manning, a Republican state senator in Ohio who is sponsoring legislation to make it clear that materials used to test drugs for fentanyl are legal.

The urgency is heightened because of the deepening impact of the drugs. Last year, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported the nation had hit a grim milestone. For the first time, more than 100,000 Americans had died of drug overdoses over a 12-month period. About two-thirds of the deaths were linked to fentanyl and other synthetic drugs, which can be 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine, heroin or prescription opioids.

The recent case of five West Point cadets who overdosed on fentanyl-laced cocaine during spring break in Florida put the dangers and pervasiveness of the fentanyl crisis back in the spotlight.

The chemical precursors to the drugs are being shipped largely from China to Mexico, where much of the illicit fentanyl supply is produced in labs before being smuggled into the U.S.

While users sometimes seek out fentanyl specifically, it and other synthetics with similar properties are often mixed with other drugs or formed into counterfeit pills so users often don't know they're taking it.

Advocates say test strips can help prevent accidental overdoses of drugs laced with fentanyl. The strips are given out at needle exchanges and sometimes at concerts or other events where drugs are expected to be sold or used.

Thomas Stuber, chief legislative officer at The LCADA Way, a drug treatment organization in Ohio that serves Lorain County and nearby areas, has been pushing for the test strip legislation. It also would ease access to naloxone, a drug that can be used to revive people when they're having opioid overdoses.

"This is a harm-reduction approach that has received a lot of acceptance," he said. "We cannot treat somebody if they're dead."

Since last year, at least a half-dozen states have enacted similar laws and at least a dozen others have considered them, according to research by the National Conference of State Legislatures.

In West Virginia, the state hardest hit by opioids per capita, lawmakers passed a bill this month to legalize the testing strips. It now heads to the governor.

The measure was sponsored by Republican lawmakers. But state Delegate Mike Pushkin, a Democrat whose district includes central Charleston, has also been pushing for more access to fentanyl strips. He said the situation got worse last year when a state law tightened regulations on needle exchanges, causing some of them to close.

Pushkin, who also is in long-term addiction recovery, is pleased with passage of the testing strip bill but upset with another measure passed this month that would increase the penalties for trafficking fentanyl. That bill also would create a new crime of adding fentanyl to another drug.

"Their initial reaction is, 'We have to do something,'" he said. "It's not just about doing something, it's about doing the right thing that actually has results."

But for many lawmakers, making sure that tough criminal penalties apply to fentanyl is a priority.

California Assemblywoman Janet Nguyen, a Republican, introduced a measure that would make penalties for dealing fentanyl just as harsh as those for selling cocaine or heroin. The Republican represents Orange County, where there were more than 600 reported fentanyl-related deaths last year.

"This is sending messages to those who aren't afraid of selling these drugs that there's a longer, bigger penalty than you might think," said Nguyen, whose bill failed to advance from her chamber's public safety committee in a 5-2 vote last week. She said after the bill failed that she was considering trying again.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 67 of 69

She said committee members stressed compassion for drug users, something she said she agrees with. "The less available these pills are out there, the better it is," Nguyen said. "And that is going after the drug dealer."

The same day her measure failed to advance, a Democratic lawmaker in California announced a different bill to increase fentanyl-dealing penalties.

The National Conference of State Legislatures found 12 states with fentanyl-specific drug trafficking or possession laws as of last year. Similar measures have been introduced or considered since the start of 2021 in at least 19 states, the Associated Press found in an analysis of bills compiled by LegiScan. That does not include measures to add more synthetic opioids to controlled substance lists to mirror federal law; those have been adopted in many states, with bipartisan support.

Fentanyl has been in the spotlight in Colorado since February, when five people were found dead in a suburban Denver apartment from overdoses of fentanyl mixed with cocaine.

Under state law, possession with intent to distribute less than 14 grams of fentanyl is an offense normally punishable by two to four years in prison. But fentanyl is so potent that 14 grams can represent up to 700 lethal doses, under a calculation used by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency.

"It's making it impossible to hold the dealer accountable for the deadliness of the drugs they're peddling," Colorado House Speaker Alec Garnett, a Democrat, said in an interview.

He and a bipartisan group of lawmakers last week unveiled a bill also backed by Democratic Gov. Jared Polis that would increase penalties for dealers with smaller amounts of fentanyl and in cases where the drug leads to a death. The legislation also would increase the accessibility of naloxone and test strips while steering people who possess fentanyl into education and treatment programs.

Maritza Perez, director of national affairs at the Drug Policy Alliance, a group that advocates for harm-reduction measures, is skeptical of the legislation that would increase criminal penalties.

"We have the largest incarceration rate in the entire world and we're also setting records in terms of overdose deaths," she said.

Democratic governors are focusing primarily on harm reduction methods. Among them is Illinois Gov. Jay Pritzker, who released a broad overdose action plan last month.

Several Republican governors and attorneys general have responded to the rising death toll with administrative enforcement efforts and by pushing for more federal intervention.

Last year, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey called for states to help secure the border with Mexico. Along with trying to keep people from entering the U.S., stopping the flow of fentanyl was cited as a reason. Several other Republican governors have sent contingents of state troopers or National Guard units.

The Texas Military Department said that from March 2021 through earlier this month, its troops near the border confiscated more than 1,200 pounds (540 kilograms) of fentanyl. By comparison, federal authorities reported confiscating about 11,000 pounds (4,990 kilograms) in 2021 — still a fraction of what entered the country.

Last year, the U.S. Department of Justice filed about 2,700 cases involving crimes related to the distribution of fentanyl and similar synthetic drugs, up nearly tenfold from 2017. Even so, Republican state officials are critical of federal efforts to stop fentanyl from entering the country.

In January, 16 GOP state attorneys general sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken calling on him to exert more pressure on China and Mexico to stop the flow of fentanyl. Those are steps that Dr. Rahul Gupta, the director of National Drug Control Policy, said are already being taken.

In March, West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey called on U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland for more enforcement on fentanyl trafficking and harsher penalties.

"Fentanyl is killing Americans of all walks of life in unprecedented numbers," Morrisey said in a statement emailed to the AP, "and the federal government must respond with full force, across the board, using every tool available to stem the tide of death."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 68 of 69

Talks on new UN climate report going down to the wire

By FRANK JORDANS Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Negotiations between scientists and governments over a key United Nations climate report were going down to the wire Sunday, as officials from major emerging economies insisted that it should recognize their right to development.

The latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a U.N.-backed science body, is meant to show the paths by which the world can stay within the temperature limits agreed in the 2015 Paris accord.

The agreement aims to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) this century. But with temperatures already more than 1.1C higher than the pre-industrial baseline, many experts say that's only possible with drastic cuts to greenhouse gas emissions.

The closed-doors meeting was meant to wrap up Friday so that the report could be presented to the public on Monday.

But several observers, who spoke only on condition of anonymity because of the confidential nature of the proceedings, told The Associated Press that the talks were still far from finished with less than 24 hours to go before the publication deadline.

One senior climate scientist said about 70% of the text had so far been agreed and there was still hope the negotiations might finish Sunday.

India has emerged as a key voice pushing for recognition in the report that developing countries have contributed a far smaller share of the carbon dioxide emissions already in the atmosphere than industrialized nations and should therefore not need to make the same steep cuts. India, which remains heavily dependent on coal, also wants poor countries to receive significantly more financial support to cope with climate change and make the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Others, such as oil exporter Saudi Arabia, argue that fossil fuels will still be needed for decades to come and phasing them out too quickly could hurt the world's poorest.

The text being negotiated is a summary for policymakers that will serve as the basis for government talks at international climate meetings such as the upcoming U.N. summit in Egypt this fall. The underlying science report outlining the world's progress in cutting emissions is not subject to negotiation, but it cannot be published until the summary is agreed.

A previous instalment last year warned that there is no doubt the rapid climate change seen in recent decades is caused by humans and some effects of global warming are already inevitable. Last month, the science panel outlined how further temperature increases will multiply the risk of floods, storms, drought and heat waves worldwide.

Today in History: April 4, Martin Luther King assassinated

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, April 4, the 94th day of 2022. There are 271 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 4, 1968, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., 39, was shot and killed while standing on a balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee; his slaying was followed by a wave of rioting (Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Chicago were among cities particularly hard hit). James Earl Ray later pleaded guilty to assassinating King, then spent the rest of his life claiming he'd been the victim of a setup.

On this date:

In 1841, President William Henry Harrison succumbed to pneumonia one month after his inaugural, becoming the first U.S. chief executive to die in office.

In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln, accompanied by his son Tad, visited the vanquished Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, where he was greeted by a crowd that included former slaves.

In 1917, the U.S. Senate voted 82-6 in favor of declaring war against Germany (the House followed suit

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 04, 2022 ~ Vol. 30 - No. 271 ~ 69 of 69

two days later by a vote of 373-50).

In 1945, during World War II, U.S. forces liberated the Nazi concentration camp Ohrdruf in Germany. Hungary was liberated as Soviet forces cleared out remaining German troops.

In 1949, 12 nations, including the United States, signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, D.C.

In 1973, the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center were officially dedicated. (The towers were destroyed in the terrorist attack of Sept. 11, 2001.)

In 1974, Hank Aaron of the Atlanta Braves tied Babe Ruth's home-run record by hitting his 714th round-tripper in Cincinnati.

In 1975, more than 130 people, most of them children, were killed when a U.S. Air Force transport plane evacuating Vietnamese orphans crash-landed shortly after takeoff from Saigon. Microsoft was founded by Bill Gates and Paul Allen in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

In 1983, the space shuttle Challenger roared into orbit on its maiden voyage. (It was destroyed in the disaster of January 1986.)

In 1991, Sen. John Heinz, R-Pa., and six other people, including two children, were killed when a helicopter collided with Heinz's plane over a schoolyard in Merion, Pennsylvania.

In 2011, yielding to political opposition, the Obama administration gave up on trying to prosecute mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and four alleged co-conspirators in civilian federal courts and said it would prosecute them instead before military commissions.

In 2015, in North Charleston, South Carolina, Walter Scott, a 50-year-old Black motorist, was shot to death while running away from a traffic stop; Officer Michael Thomas Slager, seen in a cellphone video opening fire at Scott, was charged with murder. (The charge, which lingered after a first state trial ended in a mistrial, was dropped as part of a deal under which Slager pleaded guilty to a federal civil rights violation; he was sentenced to 20 years in prison.)

Ten years ago: A federal judge sentenced five former New Orleans police officers to prison for the deadly Danziger Bridge shootings in the chaotic days following Hurricane Katrina. (The verdicts in the case were later set aside by the judge, who cited prosecutorial misconduct; the officers pleaded guilty in 2016 to reduced charges.)

Five years ago: A chemical attack on an opposition-held town in northern Syria left about 100 people dead; a joint investigation team made up of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and U.N. experts concluded that the Syrian government was responsible. A federal appeals court ruled for the first time that the 1964 Civil Rights Act protected LGBT employees from workplace discrimination; the case involved an Indiana teacher who charged that she wasn't hired full-time because she was a lesbian.

One year ago: On a second Easter Sunday marked by pandemic restrictions, Christianity's most joyous feast day was celebrated worldwide with the faithful far apart in pews, and singing choruses of "Hallelujah" through face coverings. Pope Francis, in his traditional Easter Sunday address, denounced as "scandalous" how armed conflicts continued to rage even as the coronavirus pandemic triggered severe social and economic suffering and swelled the ranks of the poor. Stanford beat Arizona 54-53 to become NCAA women's basketball champions.

Today's Birthdays: Recording executive Clive Davis is 90. Author Kitty Kelley is 80. Actor Craig T. Nelson is 78. Actor Walter Charles is 77. Actor Christine Lahti is 72. Country singer Steve Gatlin (The Gatlin Brothers) is 71. Actor Mary-Margaret Humes is 68. Writer-producer David E. Kelley is 66. Actor Constance Shulman is 64. Actor Phil Morris is 63. Actor Lorraine Toussaint is 62. Actor Hugo Weaving is 62. Rock musician Craig Adams (The Cult) is 60. Talk show host/comic Graham Norton is 59. Actor David Cross is 58. Actor Robert Downey Jr. is 57. Actor Nancy McKeon is 56. Actor Barry Pepper is 52. Country singer Clay Davidson is 51. Rock singer Josh Todd (Buckcherry) is 51. Singer Jill Scott is 50. Rock musician Magnus Sveningsson (The Cardigans) is 50. Magician David Blaine is 49. Singer Kelly Price is 49. R&B singer Andre Dayrimple (Soul For Real) is 48. Country musician Josh McSwain (Parmalee) is 47. Actor James Roday is 46. Actor Natasha Lyonne is 43. Actor Eric Andre is 39. Actor Amanda Righetti is 39. Actor-singer Jamie Lynn Spears is 31. Actor Daniela Bobadilla is 29. Pop singer Austin Mahone (muh-HOHN') is 26. Actor Aliyah Royale is 22.