

Groton Daily Independent

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UpComing Events

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

Wednesday, April 13

7 p.m.: "Way of the Cross" at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church

Friday, April 15 - Good Friday

No School, Groton City & States offices closed

Monday, April 18 - Easter Monday

No School, Groton City & State offices closed
10 a.m.: Girls Golf at Whetstone Creek GC in Milbank

Tuesday, April 19

7 p.m.: City Council Meeting

Wednesday, April 20

6 p.m.: FCCLA Banquet in GHS Arena Lobby

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

Chicken Soup
for the Soul



"Kindness begins with the understanding that we all struggle."

- CHARLES GLASSMAN

Thursday, April 21

Track Meet in Redfield

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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Missouri River Levels



US Army Corps
of Engineers®

Northwestern Division, Omaha District
Mainstem and Tributary Reservoir Bulletin
Project Data Date/Time: 04-09-2022 00:00
Last Updated Date/Time: 04-09-2022 07:05



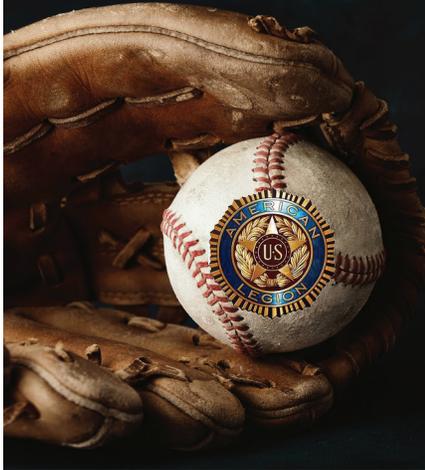
Project	Project Information				Current Data					Occupied Storage		
	Elevations (ft)		Cumulative Stor (ac-ft)		Elev (ft)	Daily Elev Change (ft)	Storage (ac-ft)	Inflow (cfs)	Release (cfs)	MP (%)	FC (ac-ft)	FC (%)
	MP	FC	MP	FC								
Missouri River Mainstem Projects												
Fort Peck Dam	2234.0	2250.0	14,788,340	18,462,840	2222.81	-0.03	M	M	5,700	M	M	M
Garrison Dam	1837.5	1854.0	17,744,640	23,451,300	1827.62	-0.09	M	M	14,600	M	M	M
Oahe Dam	1607.5	1620.0	18,667,635	22,982,900	1596.08	-0.39	M	M	26,000	M	M	M
Big Bend Dam	1420.0	1423.0	1,631,474	1,810,414	1420.65	-0.17	M	M	29,500	M	M	M
Fort Randall Dam	1350.0	1375.0	3,000,732	5,293,473	1354.26	-0.09	M	M	17,000	M	M	M
Gavins Point Dam	1204.5	1210.0	295,406	428,033	1206.67	-0.37	M	M	23,000	M	M	M
System Totals	--	--	56,128,227	72,428,960	--	--	M	--	--	M	M	M

HELP WANTED!

Part time deli clerk and part time cashier and stocker.
Apply at Ken's Food Fair, Groton

Senior Legion Baseball Meeting

Groton Legion Post #39 will be having a Baseball Meeting on Tuesday April 12, 2022 @7:00 at the Post Home. This meeting is for all Senior Legion age players who are eligible to play in the 2022 season. This meeting is required attendance for all players and their parents or legal guardian.

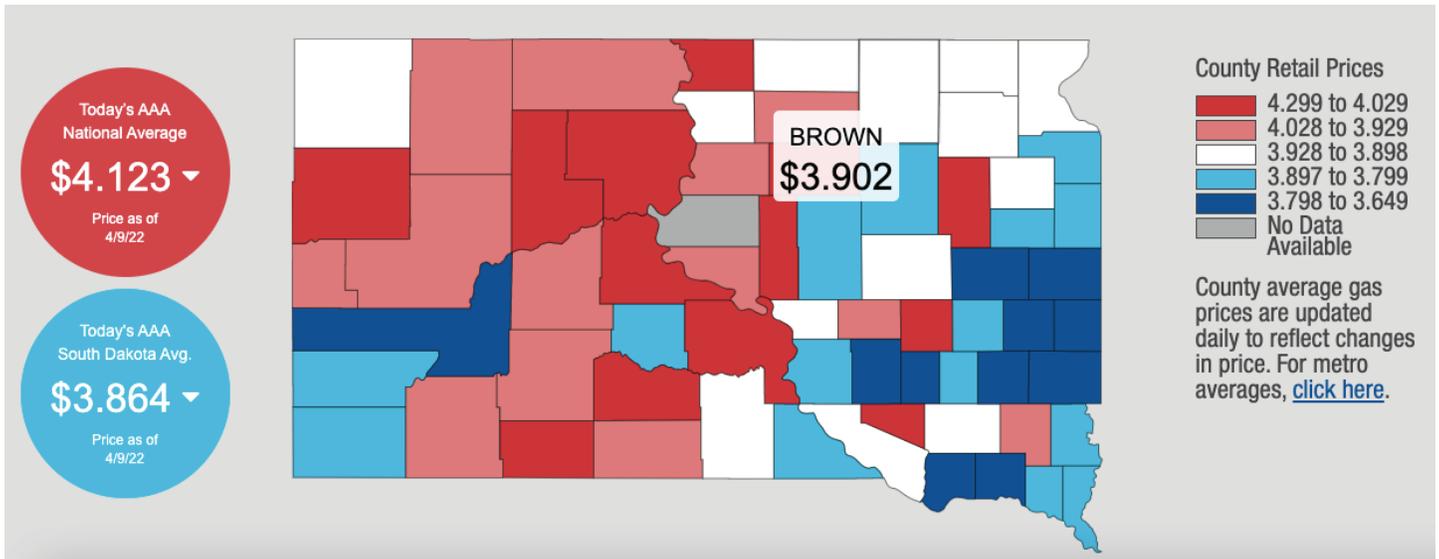


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South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.864	\$3.974	\$4.356	\$4.817
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.877	\$3.984	\$4.359	\$4.818
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.926	\$4.037	\$4.405	\$4.861
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.877	\$3.961	\$4.320	\$4.415
Year Ago Avg.	\$2.842	\$2.941	\$3.296	\$3.101



Since Monday, the national average for a gallon of regular gasoline fell by three cents to \$4.15. According to new data from the Energy Information Administration (EIA), total domestic gasoline stocks decreased by 2 million bbl to 236.8 million bbl last week. Gasoline demand increased slightly from 8.5 million b/d to 8.56 million b/d. Although supply and demand factors would have typically supported elevated pump prices, the fluctuating price of oil continues to be the main factor influencing pump prices. Pump prices will likely face downward pressure if oil prices remain below \$100 per barrel.

At the close of Wednesday's formal trading session, WTI dropped by \$5.73 to settle at \$96.23. Crude prices decreased after EIA's weekly report revealed that total domestic crude stocks increased last week by 2.5 million bbl to 412.4 million bbl, approximately 17 percent lower than the beginning of April 2021. Additionally, crude prices faced more downward pressure this week after the International Energy Agency's (IEA) 31 member countries, including Mexico, Japan, Germany, and Canada, announced plans to release 120 million barrels of crude oil from their emergency oil stockpiles. The amount includes a previously announced 60 million barrels of oil from the U.S. It would be the second coordinated release in just over a month in response to spiking oil prices after Russia invaded Ukraine. While the IEA said more details about the release would become available soon, including the release timeline, the announcement has helped ease some supply concerns, pushing crude prices lower.

Largest Weekly Decreases

Since last Thursday, these 10 states have seen the largest decreases in their averages: Connecticut (-31 cents), Michigan (-11 cents), Ohio (-11 cents), Wisconsin (-10 cents), Indiana (-10 cents), Georgia (-10 cents), Washington, D.C. (-9 cents), South Carolina (-9 cents), Nevada (-9 cents) and California (-9 cents).

GFP Tracking Lake Oahe Water Levels

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) officials are working hard this spring season to track Lake Oahe water levels and are planning for additional access work on the Missouri River reservoir.

“We know that with persisting drought conditions and low Rocky Mountain snowpack that water levels will continue to drop,” said GFP Parks Director Scott Simpson. “We will be working hard to keep plenty of ramps open along Lake Oahe, but it probably won’t be feasible to keep every ramp open.”

Fortunately, there are several low-water facilities that GFP constructed during that last low-water cycle in 2002-2006 that may be brought back into service. Many of these facilities are still under water right now and a complete assessment will not be possible until they come out of the water. For example, the Chantier Creek boat ramp will remain closed until water levels begin to rise again.

Lower water levels also require extra caution due to submerged hazards such as trees and rocks that are just under the surface. Boaters are urged to use extreme caution when out on the water and plan ahead accordingly. Underwater hazards are not marked.

Low water levels on Oahe also brings access issues of another kind and has GFP and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) reminding anglers and other recreationalists that off road vehicle, and ATV use along shores and off designated trails is not permitted.

“I know it is tempting to see those long stretches of shoreline and go off road exploring,” said GFP Law Enforcement Chief, Sam Schelhaas. “It seems so harmless, but it isn’t. Driving on those shorelines degrades those shorelines and wildlife habitat, can disturb threatened and endangered species, and disturb or destroy archeological resources. Driving off roads and along the shore is not permitted, so if you want to go explore, we are asking you to do it on foot.”

GFP officials will continue to work alongside the USACE to monitor water levels on the Missouri River closely and provide as much access as possible for anglers and boaters to enjoy the reservoir.

Anglers and boaters can visit, the [Public Fishing Access Map](#) to find boat ramp status.

Department of Revenue Encourages Individuals to Use DMV Now Kiosks Located Across the State

PIERRE, S.D. – Last year, the Department of Revenue doubled the number of locations for drivers to access DMV Now Kiosks statewide and encourages individuals to take advantage of the services provided. Five different transactions may be completed using any one of the twenty-one DMV Now Kiosk located across the state in a matter of minutes.

Transaction types include:

- Renew your vehicle’s registration,
- Update your contact information,
- Reporting the sale of a vehicle.
- Print a seller’s permit, and
- Renew your driver’s license or ID card

A vehicle owner can navigate through the easy touch screen (voice assistance available) with a valid South Dakota driver’s license, South Dakota identification card, or if a company, the information provided on its renewal notice. Once the payment has been submitted using a credit or debit card and the transaction is completed, license renewal tags and vehicle registration are dispensed directly from the machine. For information on how to use a DMV Now Kiosk, please visit: <https://dor.sd.gov/newsroom/how-to-use-a-dmv-now-kiosk/>.

South Dakotans can complete a transaction at any kiosk. The kiosk does not have to be in the same county they live in. To find your nearest DMV Now License Renewal Self-Service Kiosk and for more information, please visit <https://sddmynowkiosk.com/>.

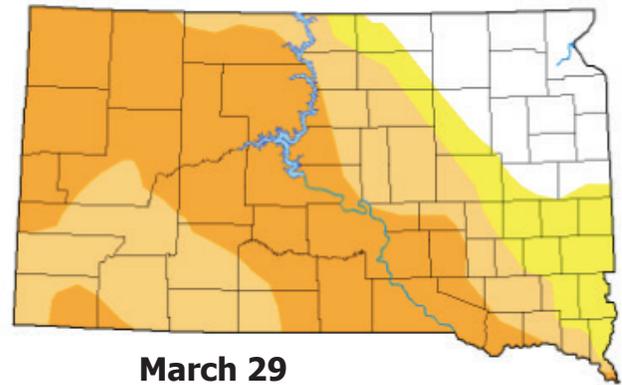
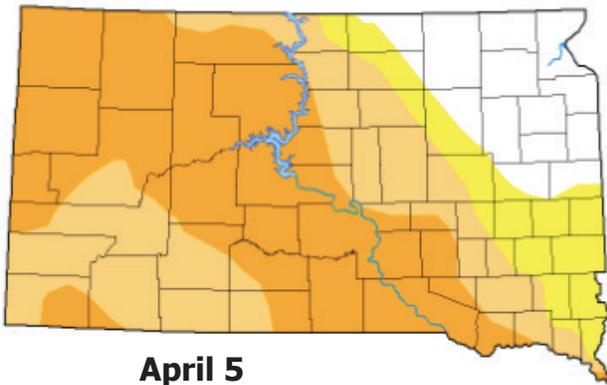
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



High Plains

South-central Colorado saw a reduction in severe (D2) and extreme (D3) drought. Last week's precipitation continued a trend of wetter-than-normal conditions that's been in place since the start of the year. Short- and long-term indicators including precipitation, snowpack, soil moisture, and stream flow are responding to the excess moisture. Severe drought also decreased in southwest Wyoming for similar reasons. Kansas saw drought worsen in the west and improve in the east. D3 expanded in southwest Kansas, where precipitation deficits are less than 10 percent of normal over the last 60 to 90 days. Other indicators supporting this assessment include increased evaporative demand and soil moisture. In eastern Kansas, the map depicts a continuation of improvements made last week. In south-central Nebraska, moderate drought expanded in response to increasing precipitation deficits, dry soil moisture indicators, and reports of low stock ponds. The rest of the region remained unchanged this week. State drought monitoring teams have all noted the increasing dryness across the region.

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GFP Commission Holds April Meeting

PIERRE, S.D.—The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission held their April meeting at the Watertown Event Center on April 7-8.

PARKS FINALIZATIONS

The Commission voted to allow for the cancellation of campsites and lodging facilities without fee for a period of time after a reservation is made. After that period has lapsed, a fee of one-half of the first night's camping or lodging fees will be assessed for both types of overnight use.

The Commission also passed two administrative rules to align business practices and requirements for license agents in preparation of launching a new online system. Go Outdoors South Dakota launched December 15, 2021. This system combines the purchases of hunting and fishing licenses with our state parks camping reservations and other purchases.

For more information on these finalizations, visit gfp.sd.gov/commission/information/.

WILDLIFE FINALIZATIONS

The Commission finalized the elk and bighorn sheep hunting seasons for 2022. For more information on these proposals, visit gfp.sd.gov/commission/information/.

Black Hills Elk -The Commission voted to adjust the total number of available licenses from 450 "any elk" and 490 "antlerless elk" licenses (total of 940 licenses) to no more than 535 "any elk" and 730 "antlerless elk" licenses (total of 1,265 licenses).

The Commission also modified the boundaries of BHE-H9A and BHE-H9B to correct the unit boundary.

Prairie Elk - The Commission increased the number of licenses available from 78 "any elk" and 178 "antlerless elk" licenses (total of 256 licenses) to 102 "any elk" and 175 "antlerless elk" licenses (total of 277 licenses).

The Commission also modified Unit PRE-9A. This will split the current unit and establish a new unit to include the portion of Meade County. They also corrected season dates for units PRE - 11D, PRE-35A and PRE-35B.

The commission also modified prairie elk units 35A (Harding County west of US Hwy. 85) and 35B (Harding County east of US Hwy. 85) to the following:

- a. Units 35A, 35C, and 35D: Harding County west of US Hwy. 85
- b. Units 35B, 35E, and 35F: Harding County east of US Hwy. 85, and to establish season dates for prairie elk units 35A, 35B, 35C, and 35D as follows:
 - a. Units 35A and 35B: September 15-October 31 AND December 1-31 (any elk licenses)
 - b. Units 35C and 35E: October 1 – November 15 (antlerless elk licenses)
 - c. Units 35D and 35F: November 16 – December 31 (antlerless elk licenses)

Archery Elk - The Commission increased the number of licenses available from 147 "any elk" and 70 "antlerless elk" licenses (total of 217 licenses) to 182 "any elk" and 90 "antlerless" (total of 272 licenses).

Custer State Park Elk - The Commission increased the total number of available licenses from 9 "any elk" licenses to no more than 12 "any elk" licenses.

Custer State Park Early Archery Elk - The Commission increased the total number of available licenses from 3 "any elk" to 4 "any elk" licenses.

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Bighorn Sheep Season - The Commission increased the number of "ram bighorn sheep" licenses from 8 to 11. They also changed the mandatory orientation meeting from "preceding the opening day of the season" to "preceding the first day of hunting by the license holder" and eliminated Unit BHS-ZZ1 for preference points, and will allow the bighorn sheep auction license to be valid for Units 2, 4, and Custer State Park.

Public Waters

The Commission removed the no boating zones and will allow for non-motorized watercraft within the Waubay National Wildlife Refuge and the Waubay State Game Bird Refuge.

GFP and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have been working in collaboration to align state and federal regulations within the USFWS Refuge System, resulting in more recreational opportunities within the refuge boundaries.

Additionally, the Commission established a no wake zone at a new boat ramp at Lake Poinsett State Recreation Area in Brookings County. They also modified the no wake zone at Belle Fourche Reservoir in Butte County to include all boat ramps.

Lake Francis Case Walleye Regulations

The Commission modified a petition in March and passed to remove the regulations on Lake Francis Case that requires the first four walleyes caught through the ice from the northern Gregory-Charles Mix County Line to the Fort Randall Dam be kept by anglers and that length limits are not in effect. Anglers would be able to keep up to four walleye they catch and the 15-inch minimum length limit would be in effect for all areas of Lake Francis Case from September 1 through June 30 and the one over 20-inches statewide regulation would be in effect year-round. The petition cited the reduced opportunity for anglers and local businesses from this current regulation.

Waterfowl Refuges

The Commission rejected a proposal to increase the size of the Pierre Waterfowl Refuge. This proposal was brought by the Commission in response to a petition submitted regarding this refuge.

WILDLIFE PROPOSALS

The commission also has several new proposals. To view them in their entirety, visit gfp.sd.gov/commission/information/.

Waterfowl Seasons

The Commission continued discussions on several waterfowl seasons.

Some of the highlighted proposed changes to these seasons are:

To include mergansers in the daily duck limit bag. Previously, mergansers had separate bag limits.

Remove restriction for nonresident hunters in the counties of Beadle, Brookings, Hanson, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, McCook, Miner, Moody, Sanborn, Turner, Union, and Minnehaha counties for the early fall Canada goose hunting season.

Mentored Spring Turkey Recruitment License for Youth

The Commission proposed to establish 10 Mentored Youth Turkey Recruitment licenses to be used statewide with the exception of Custer State Park. The benefit of a statewide license includes increasing the areas that can be hunted as not all counties or units have a spring turkey hunting season.

These licenses would be eligible for non-governmental organizations (NGO) that promote wildlife conservation and the recruitment, retention, and reactivation of hunters. Up to two licenses could be allocated to an individual NGO.

"The goal is to recruit more kids into the outdoor arena and in this case, spring turkey hunting," stated wildlife director, Tom Kirschenmann. "This is not a fundraiser, but rather a recruitment tool that would enhance partnerships and statewide recruitment, retention, and reactivation efforts specific to turkey hunting."

A mentored youth turkey recruitment license sponsored by an NGO would be available to those youth 15 years of age and younger that do not already possess any type of spring turkey hunting license. The sponsoring NGO would cover the cost of the \$5 mentor tag, while assisting the youth through the licensing process.

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License Allocation

The Commission continued their discussion on removing the requirement for unlimited access permits for archery, muzzleloader, mentor, youth, and apprentice deer license holders to hunt certain deer hunting units and public lands.

They will also limit the number of archery access permits for Unit WRD-27L to no more than 20 "any deer" access permits for residents and no more than 5 "any deer" access permits for nonresidents.

State Migratory Bird Certification

The Commission continued their discussion to separate the state migratory bird certification permit from the nonresident spring snow goose, nonresident early fall Canada goose licenses, nonresident 3-day licenses, nonresident youth waterfowl licenses and decreased applicable license fees by \$5 each.

Indian Springs/Antelope Lake

The Commission continued their discussion on changing the date and area requirements where no shooting from a boat is allowed on Indian Springs/Antelope Lake in Clark County from Oct. 10 - Dec. 31 to Oct. 20 - Dec. 31.

Public Comments Currently Being Accepted

If you would like to comment on any of these proposals, visit gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions. Comments can also be mailed to 523 E. Capitol Ave Pierre, SD

To hear the discussion on these proposals, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive.

To see these proposals in their entirety, visit gfp.sd.gov/commission/information.

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the commission, comments must include a full name and city of residence and be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on May 1.

The next GFP Commission meeting will be held May 5-6 in Custer State Park.

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- NEWS
- LIVE
- FIT
- CLEAN
- RENT

Scan Code Below for More Details



15 N Main St., Groton
PO Box 34, Groton, SD
57445-0034

www.397news.com
Call/Text Paul: 605/397-7460
Call/Text Tina: 605/397-7285
paperpaul@grotonsd.net



New at the
GDI FIT
The Stairmaster
and Air Bike



Call/Text Paul at 605/397-7460
or Tina at 605/397-7285
for membership info

Order your Graduation Balloons while we have a good supply!



#1 - \$5



#2 - \$5



#3 - \$6



#4 - \$10 - 45"



#5 - \$5



#6 - \$6



\$3.50 - 9" on a stick



#7 - \$10 - 36"



#8 - \$5



#9 - \$5



#10 - \$5



#11 - \$5



#12 - \$5



#13 - \$8 35"



#14 - \$5



#15 - \$5



#16 - \$5



#17 - \$5



#18 - \$5



#19 - \$5



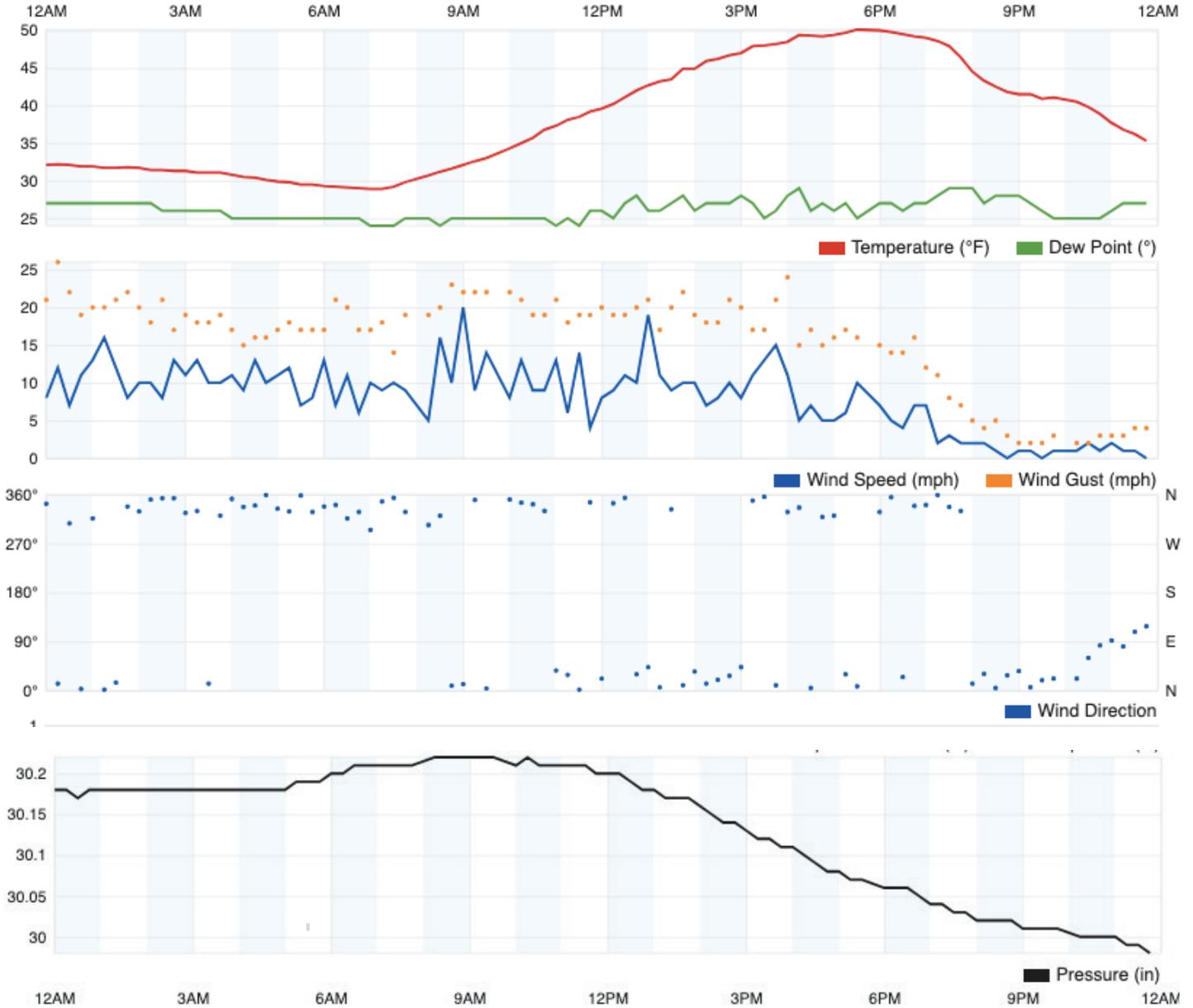
#20 - \$5

We have many other balloons available as well. We now offer locker pickup in the laundromat so you can pick up your order ANY TIME once the order is completed!

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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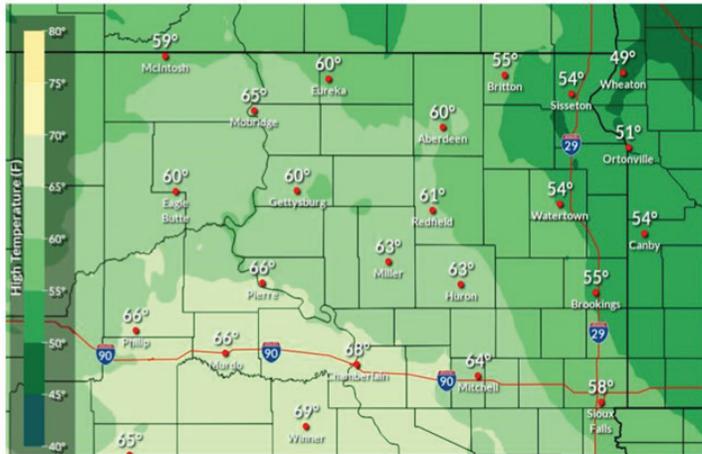
Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
Becoming Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Cloudy then Chance Rain	Chance Rain	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 60 °F	Low: 37 °F	High: 50 °F	Low: 31 °F	High: 53 °F



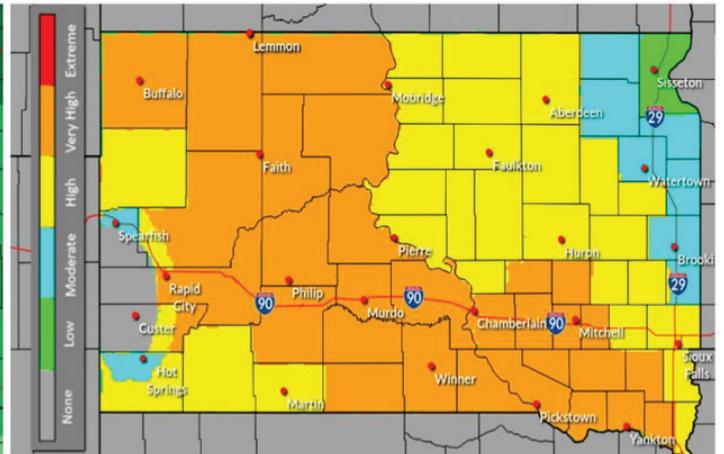
Warm and Dry Today - Very High Fire Danger

April 9, 2022
4:50 AM

High Temps Today



Grassland Fire Danger Today



- Above average high temperatures today.
- **Very high fire danger this afternoon, due to relative humidity of 20 to 25% and increasing northwesterly winds.**
- Rain, possibly mixing with snow can be expected later tonight into Sunday.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Today will feature above-average temperatures with highs in the upper 40s to the mid-60s. Very high fire danger will be expected due to warm temperatures, low afternoon humidity, and breezy conditions. A storm system crossing the area tonight into Sunday will bring a good chance for rain and perhaps light snow.

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Today in Weather History

April 9, 1997: A late season storm produced snow from the Black Hills through South Central South Dakota. The greatest amounts occurred in a 40-mile wide swath along and south of Interstate 90. Snowfall amounts included 9 inches at Rapid City, 12 inches at Deerfield, 10 inches at Custer, 11 inches at Mission, and 12 inches at Winner. Outside this swath, snowfall ranged from 3 to 6 inches.

April 9, 2007: Arctic air moved into central and northeast South Dakota and remained for nearly a week. High temperatures from April 3rd to April 9th were mostly in the 20s to around 30 degrees with lows in the single digits and teens. The high temperatures were from 20 to 30 degrees below average, and the lows were from 10 to 25 degrees below normal across all of the area. Some record lows and many record low maximum temperatures were set throughout the period. The first ten days of April were the coldest on record for Aberdeen. The early spring cold period affected many of the residents, especially farmers and ranchers, of central and northeast South Dakota. Also, many robins died from the cold and lack of food.

1889: The Norfolk Landmark reported that damage was more substantial than the August 1879 hurricane because it lasted for a much longer duration- the water was 18 inches higher. Rain, snow, and sleet fell, totaling 3.2 inches. Drummonds Bridge was swept away (later replaced by the Ghent Bridge). Trees were uprooted, and roofs were torn off.

1947: An estimated F5 tornado struck Woodward, Oklahoma during the late evening killing 95 persons and causing six million dollars damage. The tornado, one to two miles in width, and traveling at a speed of 50 mph, killed a total of 167 persons along its 221-mile path from Texas into Kansas, injured 980 others, and caused nearly ten million dollars damage.

1953: The first radar image of a tornado was detected by radar equipment at the University of Illinois Airport at Champaign, IL. Studies of the radar pictures from that day showed that a tornado of significant size and intensity could be detected.

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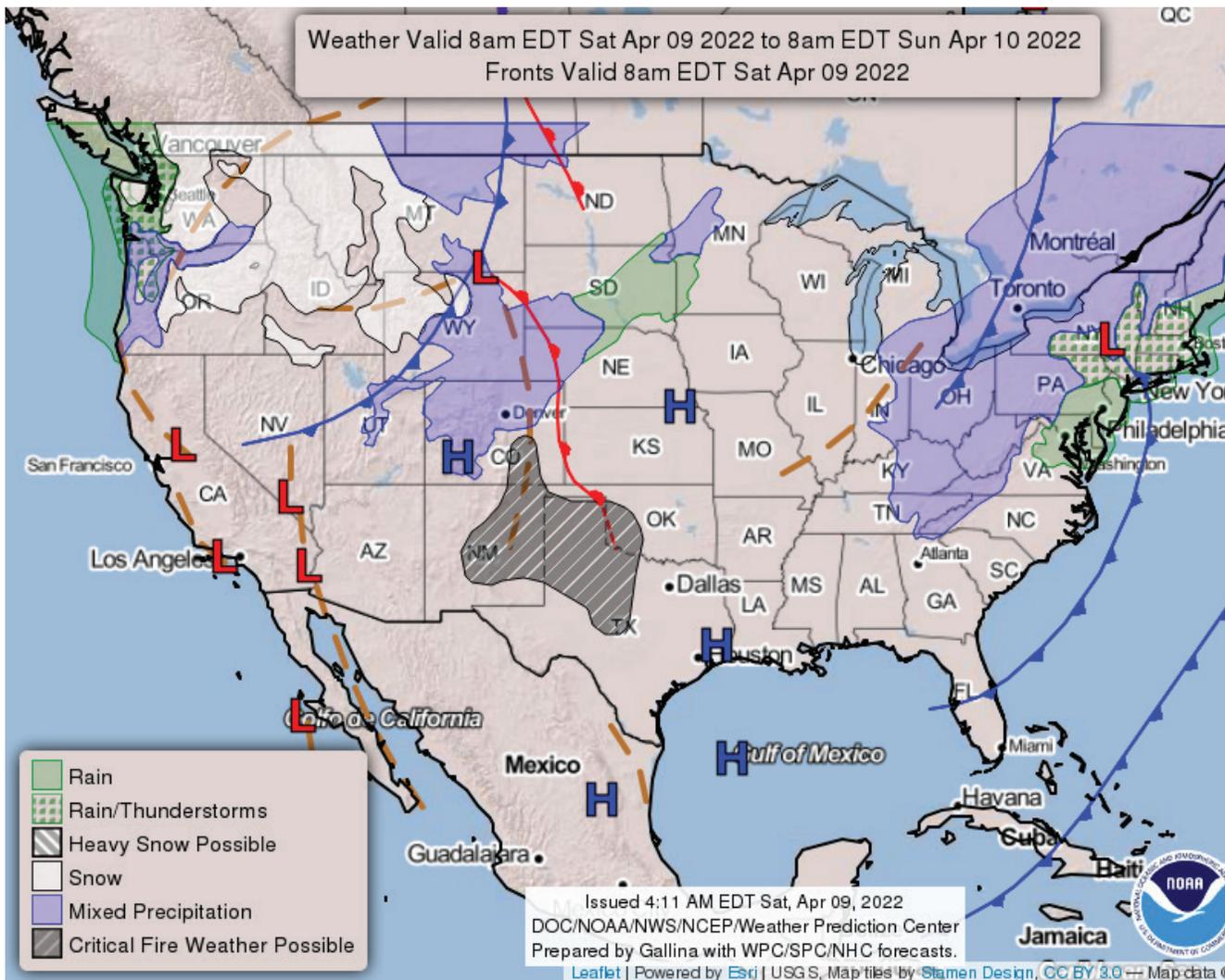
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 50 °F at 5:38 PM
Low Temp: 29 °F at 7:08 AM
Wind: 26 mph at 12:12 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 16 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 91 in 1977
Record Low: 8 in 1997
Average High: 55°F
Average Low: 29°F
Average Precip in April.: 0.41
Precip to date in April.: 0.30
Average Precip to date: 2.47
Precip Year to Date: 2.10
Sunset Tonight: 8:12:12 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:53:46 AM



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SUNSHINE AND STORMS

"What's that, Dad?" asked his son, Ben.

"A rainbow," responded his father.

"What's a rainbow, Dad?" was his next question.

"Well, Ben, a rainbow is a promise from God that He loves us and will always care for us," replied Ben's dad.

What a comforting answer for us to think about when we face troubling times. The beauty and brilliance of the colors found in a rainbow are a result of "reflections and refractions" of the sun's rays as they "light-up" the drops of rain that fall from the sky after the storm passes over us. But without the storm, there would be no rainbow.

We only see rainbows when the sun is behind us, and the rain is falling in front of us. As the rays of the sun pass through a drop of rain, it is "bent" - or refracted - and separated into the different colors that light up the sky. What we see is a brilliant display of colors produced in the countless drops of rain that fall in front of the sun.

All of us have experienced many drops of rain falling on our paths and into our lives. But God's love shines through each of them as the sun shines through the drops of rain that fall from the sky. It is the glow of His love that shines through the tears of grief, pain, hurt and suffering that fall from our eyes and brings us His comfort.

No one has lived a "tear-free life." And all of us have been caught up in the "storms of life!" Yet, we have survived. The Psalmist wrote, "They have greatly oppressed me from my youth, but have not gained the victory over me." Storms and tears come and go, but God's love always surrounds us.

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for the assurance of Your love. We look to You for healing when others harm us; and when we harm ourselves. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: They have greatly oppressed me from my youth, but have not gained the victory over me. Psalm 129:2

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2022 Community Events

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

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News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press undefined

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Friday:

Mega Millions

08-11-29-32-40, Mega Ball: 2, Megaplier: 3

(eight, eleven, twenty-nine, thirty-two, forty; Mega Ball: two; Megaplier: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$94 million

Powerball

Estimated jackpot: \$268 million

Manchin, Capito among senators asking consultation on VA

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — West Virginia's U.S. senators are among a dozen asking President Joe Biden to consult with officials state by state on the possible impact of recommendations of the Department of Veterans Affairs to the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission.

"The recommendations are overly focused on quantitative data that does not do enough to consider the impact the proposed changes would have on our Veterans, particularly elderly Veterans," said the senators. The group includes West Virginia Democrat Joe Manchin and Republican Shelley Moore Capito.

The VA released preliminary recommendations last month. The recommendations would significantly alter services provided to rural veterans across the country, according to a statement from Manchin's office Friday. Manchin and Sen. Mike Rounds, R-S.D., led a bipartisan letter the next day asking Biden to be sure rural perspectives were considered by the AIR Commission.

In the latest letter, the group of senators told Biden that VA facilities are the only place many elderly veterans seek care.

"The reasons Veterans often cite are that they are better understood, respected, and cared for at their local VA Medical Center," the letter said.

Manchin and Capito were joined by Rounds and Republican John Thune of South Dakota, Democrat Bob Casey of Pennsylvania, Democrats Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Lujan of New Mexico, Republican Steve Daines of Montana, Republicans John Barrasso and Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming, Republican Ted Cruz of Texas and Republican Lisa Murkowski of Alaska.

Firefighters stop wildfire spread west of Custer

CUSTER, S.D. (AP) — Emergency workers have stopped a wildfire just west of Custer from spreading.

The Rapid City Journal reported the Wabash Springs Fire was 100% contained as of 10 a.m. Friday.

Wabash Springs Fire Public Information Officer Kelsey Bean says 111 acres burned. Bean says no structures sustained any damage.

Lawmaker who advised attorney general recuses on impeachment

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota lawmaker who said he gave legal advice to Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg following a fatal car accident says he will not vote on whether to impeach Ravnsborg when the House convenes next week.

Republican Rep. Scott Odenbach sent a letter to the House speaker which says he plans to recuse himself from the vote and won't attend the proceedings in Pierre Tuesday. Odenbach says he will do so "to avoid even the appearance of impropriety."

Odenbach, who at the time was running for the House seat he eventually won, says Ravnsborg reached out to him for input on a public statement that was released two days after the attorney general struck

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and killed Joe Boever, a pedestrian who was walking along a rural highway in September 2020.

Odenbach, a Spearfish attorney, told North Dakota special agents that he gave Ravensborg advice on the wording of the statement, according to audio released recently with the file on the House impeachment committee's findings, South Dakota Public Broadcasting reported.

The attorney general has cast Boever's death as a tragic accident and pleaded no contest last year to a pair of traffic misdemeanors in the crash.

Ravnsborg initially reported the crash as a collision with an animal and has said he did not realize he struck a man until he returned to the scene the next day and discovered his body. Criminal investigators doubted that account, but prosecutors said they were unable to prove that Ravensborg realized he killed a man the night of the crash.

More civilians flee east Ukraine after deadly station strike

By ADAM SCHRECK and CARA ANNA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Civilian evacuations moved forward in patches of battle-scarred eastern Ukraine a day after a missile strike killed at least 52 people at a train station where thousands were waiting to leave the increasingly vulnerable region before an expected Russian onslaught.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy demanded a tough global response to Friday's train station attack in Kramatorsk, calling it the latest sign of war crimes by Russian forces and hoping to prod Western backers to step up their response to help his country defend itself.

"All world efforts will be directed to establish every minute of who did what, who gave what orders, where the missile came from, who transported it, who gave the command and how this strike was agreed," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address, his voice rising in anger.

Russia denied it was responsible and accused Ukraine's military of firing on the station to try to turn blame for civilian slayings on Moscow. A Russian Defense Ministry spokesman detailed the missile's trajectory and Ukrainian troop positions to bolster the argument. Western experts and Ukrainian authorities insisted that Russia launched the missile.

Ukraine's state railway company said in a statement that residents of the country's contested Donbas region, where Russia has refocused its forces after failing to take over the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, could flee through other train stations on Saturday.

"The railways do not stop the task of taking everyone to safety," the statement on the messaging app Telegram said.

Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said 10 evacuation corridors were planned for Saturday in hopes of allowing residents to leave war zones in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, which comprise the Donbas, as well as neighboring Zaporizhzhia.

Ukrainian authorities have called on civilians to get out ahead of an imminent, stepped-up offensive by Russian forces. Britain's Defense Ministry reported Saturday that Russian naval forces were launching cruise missiles to support the ground operations in eastern Ukraine, including in the port cities of Mykolaiv and Mariupol.

Photos taken after Friday's missile strike showed corpses covered with tarpaulins, and the remnants of a rocket painted with the words "For the children" in Russian. The phrasing seemed to suggest the missile was sent to avenge the loss or subjugation of children, although its exact meaning remained unclear.

The attack came as Ukrainian authorities worked to identify victims and document possible war crimes by Russian soldiers in northern Ukraine. The mayor of Bucha, a town near Kyiv where graphic evidence of civilian slayings emerged after the Russians withdrew, said search teams were still finding the bodies of people shot at close range in yards, parks and city squares.

On Friday, workers unearthed the bodies of 67 people from a mass grave near a church, according to Ukraine's prosecutor general. Russia has falsely claimed that the scenes in Bucha were staged.

After failing to occupy Kyiv in the face of stiff resistance, Russian forces have set their sights on eastern Ukraine. Many of the civilians now trying to evacuate are accustomed to living in or near a war zone be-

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cause Moscow-backed rebels have been fighting Ukrainian forces since 2014 in the Donbas.

The same week Russia invaded Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized the independence of areas controlled by the separatists and said he planned to send troops in to protect residents of the mostly Russian-speaking, industrial region.

Although the Kramatorsk train station is in Ukrainian government-controlled territory in the Donbas, the separatists, who work closely with Russian troops, blamed Ukraine for the attack.

Western experts, however, dismissed Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov's assertion that Russian forces "do not use" Tochka-U missiles, the type that hit the station. A Western official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence, said Russian forces have used the missile — and that given the strike's location and impact, it was likely Russia's.

Ukrainian authorities and Western officials have repeatedly accused Russian forces of committing atrocities in the war that began with Russia's Feb. 24 invasion. A total of 176 children have been killed in Ukraine since the start of the war, while 324 more have been wounded, the country's Prosecutor General's Office said Saturday.

Ukrainian authorities have warned they expect to find more mass killings once they reach the southern port city of Mariupol, which is also in the Donbas and has been subjected to a monthlong blockade and intense fighting.

As journalists who had been largely absent from the city began to trickle back in, new images emerged of the devastation from an airstrike on a theater last month that reportedly killed hundreds of civilians seeking shelter.

Military analysts had predicted for weeks that Russia would succeed in taking Mariupol but said Ukrainian defenders were still putting up a fight. The city's location on the Sea of Azov is critical to establishing a land bridge from the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine eight years ago.

Some of the grisliest evidence of atrocities so far has been found in Bucha and other towns around Kyiv, from which Russian troops pulled back in recent days. An international organization formed to identify the dead and missing from the 1990s Balkans conflicts is sending a team of forensics experts to Ukraine to help put names to bodies.

In an excerpted interview with American broadcaster CBS' "60 Minutes" that aired Friday, Zelenskyy cited communications intercepted by the Ukrainian security service as evidence of Russian war crimes. The authenticity of the recordings could not be independently verified.

"There are (Russian) soldiers talking with their parents about what they stole and who they abducted. There are recordings of (Russian) prisoners of war who admitted to killing people," he said. "There are pilots in prison who had maps with civilian targets to bomb. There are also investigations being conducted based on the remains of the dead."

The deaths of civilians at the train station brought renewed expressions of outrage from Western leaders and pledges that Russia would face further reprisals for its actions in Ukraine. On Saturday, Russia's Defense Ministry tried to counter the dominant international narrative by again raising the specter Ukraine planting false flags and misinformation.

A ministry spokesman, Major Gen. Igor Konashenkov, alleged Ukraine's security services were preparing a "cynical staged" media operation in Irpin, another town near Kyiv. Konashenkov said the plan was to show -- falsely, he said -- more civilian casualties at the hands of the Russians and to stage the slaying of a fake Russian intelligence team that intended to kill witnesses. The claims could not be independently verified.

A senior U.S. defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal military assessments said Friday that the Pentagon believes Russia has lost between 15% and 20% of its combat power overall since the war began.

While some combat units are withdrawing to be resupplied in Russia, Moscow has added thousands of troops around Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, in the country's east, the official said.

Ukrainian officials have almost daily pleaded with Western powers to send more arms, and to further punish Russia with sanctions, including the exclusion of Russian banks from the global financial system

and a total European Union embargo on Russian gas and oil.

Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer on Saturday was the latest in a parade of top leaders from the European Union to visit Zelenskyy in Kyiv. The head of the EU's executive arm, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, gave the Ukrainian president a questionnaire Friday that could lead to Ukraine's membership in the 27-member-country bloc.

Zelenskyy wryly promised to fast-track a response.

War Crimes Watch: A devastating walk through Bucha's horror

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

BUCHA, Ukraine (AP) — There is a body in the basement of the abandoned yellow home at the end of the street near the railroad tracks. The man is young, pale, a dried trickle of blood by his mouth, shot to death and left in the dark, and no one knows why the Russians brought him there, to a home that wasn't his.

There is a pile of toys near the stairs to the basement. Plastic clothespins sway on an empty line under a cold, gray sky. They are all that's left of normal on this blackened end of the street in Bucha, where tank treads lay stripped from charred vehicles, civilian cars are crushed, and ammunition boxes are stacked beside empty Russian military rations and liquor bottles.

The man in the basement is almost an afterthought, one more body in a town where death is abundant, but satisfactory explanations for it are not.

A resident, Mykola Babak, points out the man after pondering the scene in a small courtyard nearby. Three men lay there. One is missing an eye. On an old carpet near one body, someone has placed a handful of yellow flowers.

A dog paces by a wheelbarrow around the corner, agitated. The wheelbarrow holds the body of another dog. It has been shot, too.

This story is part of an ongoing investigation from The Associated Press and Frontline that includes the War Crimes Watch Ukraine interactive experience and an upcoming documentary.

Babak stands, a cigarette in one hand, a plastic bag of cat food in the other.

"I'm very calm today," he says. "I shaved for the first time."

At the beginning of their monthlong occupation of Bucha, he said, the Russians kept pretty much to themselves, focused on forward progress. When that stalled they went house to house looking for young men, sometimes taking documents and phones. Ukrainian resistance seemed to wear on them. The Russians seemed angrier, more impulsive. Sometimes they seemed drunk.

The first time they visited Babak, they were polite. But when they returned on his birthday, March 28, they screamed at him and his brother-in-law. They put a grenade to the brother-in-law's armpit and threatened to pull the pin. They took an AK-47 and fired near Babak's feet. Let's kill him, one of them said, but another Russian told them to leave it and go.

Before they left, the Russians asked him an excellent question: "Why are you still here?"

Like many who stayed in Bucha, Babak is older -- 61. It was not as easy to leave. He thought he would be spared. And yet, in the end, the stressed-out Russians accused him of being a saboteur. He spent a month under occupation without electricity, without running water, cooking over a fire. He was not prepared for this war.

Maybe the Russians weren't either.

Around 6 p.m. on March 31, and Babak remembers this clearly, the Russians jumped into their vehicles and left, so quickly that they abandoned the bodies of their companions.

"On this street we were fine," Mykola says, taking stock of the occupation. In Bucha, everything is relative. "They weren't shooting anyone who stepped out of their house. On the next street, they did."

Walking through Bucha, The Associated Press encountered two dozen witnesses of the Russian occupa-

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tion. Almost everyone said they saw a body, sometimes several more. Civilians were killed, mostly men, sometimes picked off at random. Many, including the elderly, say they themselves were threatened.

The question that survivors, investigators and the world would like to answer is why. Ukraine has seen the horrors of Mariupol, Kharkiv, Chernihiv and nearby Irpin. But the images from this town an hour's drive from Kyiv have seared themselves into global consciousness like no other. Mayor Anatoliy Fedoruk said the count of dead civilians was 320 as of Wednesday.

Vladyslav Minchenko is an artist who helps to collect the bodies.

"It certainly appears to be very, very deliberate. But it's difficult to know what more motivation was behind this," a senior U.S. defense official said this week, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the military assessment.

The residents of Bucha, as they venture out of cold homes and basements, offer theories. Some believe the Russians weren't ready for an extended fight or had especially undisciplined fighters among them. Some believe the house-to-house targeting of younger men was a hunt for those who had fought the Russians in recent years in separatist-held eastern Ukraine and had been given housing in the town.

By the end, any shred of discipline broke down.

Grenades were tossed into basements, bodies thrown into wells. Women in their 70s were told not to stick their heads out of their houses or they'd be killed. "If you leave home, I'll obey the order, and you know what the order is. I'll burn your house," Tetyana Petrovskaya recalls one soldier telling her.

At first, the Russians behaved, says 63-year-old Nataliya Aleksandrova. "They said they had come for three days." Then they got hungry. They got cold. They started to loot. They shot TV screens for no reason.

They feared there were spies among the Ukrainians. Aleksandrova says her nephew was detained on March 7 after being spotted filming destroyed tanks with his phone. Four days later, he was found in a basement, shot in the ear.

Days later, thinking the Russians were gone, Aleksandrova and a neighbor slipped out to shutter nearby homes and protect them from looting. The Russians caught them and took them to a basement.

"They asked us, 'Which type of death do you prefer, slow or fast?'" Grenade or gun? They were given 30 seconds to decide. Suddenly the soldiers were called away, leaving Aleksandrova and her neighbor shaken but alive.

The Russians became desperate when it became clear they wouldn't be able to move on Kyiv, says Sergei Radetskiy. The soldiers were just thinking about how to loot and get out.

"They needed to kill someone," he says. "And killing civilians is very easy."

Intel: Putin may cite Ukraine war to meddle in US politics

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin may use the Biden administration's support for Ukraine as a pretext to order a new campaign to interfere in American politics, U.S. intelligence officials have assessed.

Intelligence agencies have so far not found any evidence that Putin has authorized measures like the ones Russia is believed to have undertaken in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections in support of former President Donald Trump, according to several people familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive findings.

But given Putin's antipathy toward the West and his repeated denunciations of Ukraine, officials believe he may see the U.S. backing of Ukraine's resistance as a direct affront to him, giving him further incentive to target another U.S. election, the people said. It is not yet clear which candidates Russia might try to promote or what methods it might use.

The assessment comes with the U.S. electoral system already under pressure. The American public remains sharply divided over the last presidential election and the insurrection that followed at the U.S. Capitol, when supporters of Trump tried to stop the certification of his loss to President Joe Biden. Trump has repeatedly assailed intelligence officials and claimed investigations of Russian influence on his cam-

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paigns to be political vendettas.

Tensions between Washington and Moscow have reached levels not seen since the end of the Cold War. The White House has increased military support for Ukraine, which has mounted a robust resistance against Russian forces accused of committing war crimes, and helped impose global sanctions that have crippled Russia's economy.

There's no sign the war will end soon, which some experts say could delay Moscow from pursuing retaliation while its resources are mired in Ukraine. But "it's almost certain that a depleted Russian military after Ukraine is going to again double down on hybrid tactics to wreak havoc against us and other allied countries," said David Salvo, deputy director of the German Marshall Fund's Alliance for Securing Democracy.

In Ukraine and in past campaigns against adversaries, Russia has been accused of trying to spread disinformation, amplifying pro-Kremlin voices in the West and using cyberattacks to disrupt governments.

Top U.S. intelligence officials are still working on plans for a new center authorized by Congress focusing on foreign influence campaigns by Russia, China and other adversaries. Avril Haines, the U.S. director of national intelligence, also recently appointed career CIA officer Jeffrey Wichman to the position of election threats executive several months after the departure of the previous executive, Shelby Pierson.

"Our Election Threats Executive continues to lead the Intelligence Community's efforts against foreign threats to U.S. elections," said Nicole de Haay, a spokesperson for Haines, in a statement. "We're also continuing to work to deliver on the legislative requirement to create a center to integrate intelligence on foreign malign influence."

De Haay declined to comment on what intelligence officials think of Putin's intentions. Russia's embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment.

Foreign adversaries have long looked to interfere in American politics, according to investigations of past elections and indictments brought against alleged foreign agents. The U.S. has accused Putin of ordering influence operations to try to help Trump in the 2020 election. And a bipartisan Senate investigation of the 2016 election confirmed intelligence findings that Russia used cyber-espionage and information efforts to boost Trump and disparage his opponent, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Special counsel Robert Mueller's nearly two-year investigation found no conclusive evidence that the Trump campaign conspired with Russia, but Mueller declined to pass judgment on whether Trump obstructed justice.

Trump continues to falsely insist that the election he lost to Biden was stolen, with Republicans in many states following his lead and opposing election security measures.

Law enforcement and intelligence agencies continuously investigate foreign influence efforts. The Justice Department last month charged five men with acting on behalf of China to harass Chinese dissidents in the U.S. and derail a little-known congressional candidate.

Experts say the proposed Foreign Malign Influence Center would bring much-needed direction to efforts across government studying adversaries. Congress provided partial funding for the center in the budget passed last month because the budget funds the government through September and not a full year.

The center has been previously delayed over questions within the intelligence director's office and on Capitol Hill about its structure and size and whether it would unnecessarily duplicate efforts that already exist in government. In a sign that some of those questions remain unresolved, Congress last month also required the director's office to complete within six months a report on the "future structure, responsibilities, and organizational placement" of the center.

Rep. Mike Turner of Ohio, the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, said in a statement that the committee was closely watching "the malign activities of our adversaries" and the proposed center could be one way to help.

"As Russia continues to use disinformation campaigns in Ukraine, we are reminded to be strategic in our response to countering their tactics," Turner said. "It is no secret that our adversaries use disinformation to undermine the national security interests of the U.S., so we must take into account all viable options to protect our democracy."

Pakistan's embattled PM faces tough no-confidence vote

By KATHY GANNON Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan's embattled prime minister faces a tough no-confidence vote Saturday introduced by his political opponents, who say they have the votes to defeat him.

A combined opposition that spans the political spectrum from left to radically religious says it has the 172 votes it needs in Pakistan's 342-seat Parliament to oust Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Khan took to national television on the eve of the vote calling on supporters to take to the streets to protest on Sunday, an indication he believed he would lose the vote. Pakistan's five-member Supreme Court on Thursday blocked Khan's bid to stay in power, ruling that his move to dissolve Parliament and call early elections was illegal.

Thursday's court decision set the stage for a no-confidence vote, which was likely to go against Khan after several of his ruling party members and a small but key coalition partner defected.

In a brief exchange in Parliament on Saturday, opposition leader Shahbaz Sharif warned against further delays. Sharif is a likely candidate to replace Khan should Khan lose the vote, which the opposition introduced last month accusing the prime minister of economic mismanagement that has driven up prices and interest rates.

Khan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, meanwhile, demanded an investigation into ruling party allegations that the no-confidence vote was a ploy by the opposition and America to unseat Khan, who was not present. Qureshi resumed a speech to Parliament in the afternoon in what some opposition lawmakers said was a delaying tactic by the government.

In an impassioned speech Friday, Khan doubled down on his accusations that his opponents colluded with the United States to unseat him over his foreign policy choices, which often seemed to favor China and Russia and defied U.S. criticism.

Khan said Washington opposed his Feb. 24 meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin hours after tanks rolled into Ukraine launching a devastating war in the heart of Europe.

The U.S. State Department has denied any involvement in Pakistan's internal politics. Deputy State Department spokeswoman Jalina Porter told reporters on Friday there was "absolutely no truth to these allegations."

"Of course, we continue to follow these developments and support Pakistan's constitutional process, but again these allegations are absolutely not true," she said.

Still, Khan urged his supporters to take to the streets, particularly the youth who have been the backbone of his support since the former cricket star turned conservative Islamist politician came to power in 2018. He said they needed to protest an America that wants to dictate to Pakistan to protect Pakistan's sovereignty.

"You have to come out to protect your own future. It is you who have to protect your democracy, your sovereignty and your independence. ... This is your duty," he said. "I will not accept an imposed government."

Khan's options are limited and should he see a big turnout in support, he may try to keep the momentum of street protests as a way to pressure Parliament to dissolve and go to early elections.

A no-confidence vote loss for Khan on Saturday would bring to power some unlikely partners.

Among them is a radically religious party that runs scores of religious schools. The Jamiat-e-ulema-Islam, or Assembly of Clerics, teaches a deeply conservative brand of Islam in its schools. Many of Afghanistan's Taliban and Pakistan's own homegrown violent Taliban graduated from JUI schools.

The largest among the opposition parties — the Pakistan People's Party, led by the son of slain former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, and the Pakistan Muslim League — have been tainted by allegations of widespread corruption.

Pakistan Muslim League leader and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was convicted of corruption after being named in the so-called Panama Papers. That's a collection of leaked secret financial documents showing how some of the world's richest hide their money and involving a global law firm based in Panama.

Sharif was disqualified by Pakistan's Supreme Court from holding office.

If the opposition wins the no-confidence vote, it is up to Parliament to choose a new head of government, which could be Sharif's brother, Shahbaz Sharif. If the lawmakers are unsuccessful, early elections would be called.

Accused shooter in Lady Gaga dog theft mistakenly freed

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A gunman accused of shooting and seriously wounding Lady Gaga's dog walker and stealing her two French bulldogs was mistakenly released from jail and is being sought, authorities said Friday.

James Howard Jackson, 19, was facing an attempted murder charge when he was released from Los Angeles County's jail on Wednesday "due to a clerical error," the county Sheriff's Department said in a statement.

The sheriff's Major Crimes Bureau is working on finding him, the statement said.

Jackson is one of five people arrested in connection with the Feb. 24, 2021, attack in Hollywood. Prosecutors said Jackson and two other alleged gang members had driven around looking for expensive French bulldogs to steal, then spotted, tailed and robbed Ryan Fischer as he walked Lady Gaga's dogs near Sunset Boulevard.

During a violent struggle, Fischer was hit, choked and then shot in an attack captured by the doorbell camera of a nearby home.

The camera recorded the dog walker screaming "Oh, my God! I've been shot!" and "Help me!" and "I'm bleeding out from my chest!"

Fischer lost part of a lung.

"While I'm deeply concerned at the events that led to his release, I'm confident law enforcement will rectify the error," Fischer said in a statement obtained by KABC-TV. "I ask for Mr. Jackson to turn himself over to the authorities, so resolution to the crime committed against me runs its course, whatever the courts determine that outcome to be."

The pop star's dogs were returned two days later by a woman who claimed she had found them tied to a pole and asked about Lady Gaga's offer of a \$500,000 reward if the dogs were returned "no questions asked." The singer was in Rome at the time filming a movie.

She's charged with receiving stolen property and the father of another suspect is charged with helping him avoid arrest.

Jackson already had been charged in the attack and had pleaded not guilty when the county district attorney's office filed a superceding indictment Tuesday charging him with attempted murder, conspiracy to commit a robbery and assault with a semiautomatic firearm.

The move was done "to speed up the legal process" and Jackson was arraigned Wednesday under a new case number, the DA's office said in a statement.

"Mr. Jackson was subsequently released from custody by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. We are unsure as to why they did so," the statement said.

2 European divers rescued in Indonesia, Dutch teenager dead

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — Two European divers were rescued by fishermen on Saturday but a third, a 14-year-old Dutch, had died, four days after they disappeared off a southern Malaysian island and drifted some 70 nautical miles (100 kilometers), authorities said.

Alexia Alexandra Molina, 18, of France and Adrian Peter Chesters, 46, of Britain were found early Saturday in neighboring Indonesian waters and taken to a hospital, the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency said.

Chesters' Dutch son, Nathen Renze Chesters, remained missing but Chesters told police that he had died because he was too weak, the agency said in a statement.

The agency said it notified Indonesian authorities to continue searching for the body. The search operation in Malaysia has been called off.

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Molina and Chesters were found 16 nautical miles (30 kilometers) north of Indonesia's Bintan Island, which is about 70 nautical miles (100 kilometers) from the location they were reported missing on Wednesday, according to Mersing police chief Cyril Edward Nuing.

The three were diving with their Norwegian instructor, Kristine Grodem, about 15 meters (50 feet) deep at an island off Mersing town in Malaysia's southern Johor state. Grodem, 35, was rescued Thursday by a tugboat. She said the four of them surfaced safely Wednesday afternoon but later drifted away from the boat and were separated by a strong current.

Grodem was training for the other three, who were seeking to obtain advanced diving licenses, maritime officials said.

The boat skipper was detained for further investigation, and diving activities off Mersing were suspended. There are several islands off the town that are popular dive spots.

Malaysia's borders reopened to foreigners on April 1 after being closed for more than two years during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hong Kong's ex-No. 2 official to stand for leadership polls

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong's former No. 2 official John Lee on Saturday formally declared his candidacy for the upcoming leadership election, entering the race for chief executive viewed by many as Beijing's preferred candidate.

Lee said at an online news conference that he would stand for the election on May 8 after the Chinese government approved his resignation, which he submitted last week, as the city's chief secretary for administration.

He said a new government under his leadership would safeguard the rule of law and the "one country, two systems" framework in the city that allows Hong Kong to govern semi-autonomously and enjoy certain freedoms not found in mainland China.

"This decision is made out of my loyalty to my country, my love for Hong Kong, and my sense of duty to the Hong Kong people," Lee said.

Lee's candidacy comes after current leader Carrie Lam announced she would not run for a second term, following a rocky five years in power that spanned the COVID-19 pandemic, a crackdown on political freedoms and Beijing's rapid and growing influence over the territory.

Lee, 64, is a staunch advocate of the city's national security law, which has been used since 2020 to target pro-democracy activists, supporters and media, diminishing freedoms promised to Hong Kong during Britain's handover to China in 1997.

Experts in the city see a potential administration under Lee as a signal that Beijing could further tighten its grip on the semi-autonomous Chinese city.

The chief executive will be voted in by an election committee of about 1,500 people, a majority of whom are pro-Beijing. The new leader will take office on July 1.

Lee spent the early years of his civil service career as a police officer and steadily climbed the ranks. He became Hong Kong's security minister in July 2017 under Lam's administration, and last June was promoted to chief secretary for administration.

Lee was a key figure in proposing contentious legislation in 2019 that would have allowed suspects in Hong Kong to be extradited to mainland China. He later oversaw a police crackdown on demonstrators after the proposed bill sparked months of massive anti-government protests in 2019.

After the protests were snuffed out, Lee was an outspoken supporter of the national security law imposed on the city, which outlaws subversion, secession, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces in the city's affairs and has been used to suppress dissent. Over 150 people have been arrested since the law was implemented.

In 2020, the U.S sanctioned Lee, together with Lam and other Hong Kong and mainland Chinese government officials, for "undermining Hong Kong's autonomy and restricting the freedom of expression or

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assembly.”

Next month’s election will be the first since Hong Kong’s electoral laws were amended last year to ensure that only “patriots” loyal to Beijing can hold office. The changes make it difficult for pro-democracy supporters to run for chief executive.

Hong Kong’s leader is chosen every five years, although the selection process is carefully orchestrated behind the scenes by Beijing. The four chief executives selected since Hong Kong’s handover have all been candidates seen as favored by Beijing.

Lee said he would focus policymaking on ensuring that Hong Kong remains competitive globally and “bolster its role as a gateway and bridge between our country and the world.”

Vehicle collides with food truck in Austin, Texas; 11 hurt

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Eleven people were injured in a “major collision” Friday night in Austin, Texas, involving pedestrians and two vehicles, one of which hit a food truck, authorities said.

Austin-Travis County Emergency Medical Services tweeted that two of the victims sustained potential life-threatening injuries. Seven others sustained non-life-threatening injuries requiring medical evaluation. The other two didn’t require hospitalization.

The collision occurred in a popular area near downtown Austin where there are frequently several food carts stationed.

Jennifer Dunn, an employee at a nearby restaurant, told The Associated Press that a group of 25 people had just left to get ice cream at a food truck a few feet away when patrons inside the restaurant heard a loud boom.

Dunn said several members of the group then ran back inside injured and asking for help. Dunn said she and others ran to the scene where several people, including the drivers, appeared severely hurt.

“We work in the restaurant industry, so we are used to helping,” Dunn said. “I have been doing this for a long (time), so have the servers and we just wanted to help.”

Austin is the Texas state capital and home to the flagship campus of the University of Texas.

Jackson, COVID and a retirement show Congress’ partisan path

By ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A milestone Supreme Court confirmation that endured a flawed process. The collapse of a bipartisan compromise for more pandemic funds. The departure of a stalwart of the dwindling band of moderate House Republicans.

Party-line fights on Capitol Hill are as old as the republic, and they routinely escalate as elections approach. Yet three events from a notable week illustrate how Congress’ near- and long-term paths point toward intensifying partisanship.

THE SENATE’S SUPREME COURT BATTLE

Democrats rejoiced Thursday when the Senate by 53-47 confirmed Ketanji Brown Jackson as the first Black female justice. They crowed about a bipartisan stamp of approval from the trio of Republicans who supported it: Sens. Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Mitt Romney of Utah.

Yet by historical standards, the three opposition party votes were paltry and underscored the recent trend of Supreme Court confirmations becoming loyalty tests on party ideology. That’s a departure from a decades-long norm when senators might dislike a nominee’s judicial philosophy but defer to a president’s pick, barring a disqualifying revelation.

Murkowski said her support for Jackson was partly “rejection of the corrosive politicization” of how both parties consider Supreme Court nominations, which “is growing worse and more detached from reality by the year.”

Republicans said they would treat Jackson respectfully, and many did. Their questions and criticisms of her were pointed and partisan, with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., saying “the Senate views itself as a co-partner in this process” with the president.

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Yet some potential 2024 GOP presidential contenders seemed to use Jackson's confirmation to woo hard-right support. Sens. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and Josh Hawley, R-Mo., misleadingly accused her of being unusually lenient on child pornography offenders. Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., suggested she might have defended Nazis at the Nuremberg trials after World War II.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Richard Durbin, D-Ill., said some Republicans "went overboard, as far as I'm concerned, to the extreme," reflecting "the reality of politics on Capitol Hill." Cotton was "fundamentally unfair, but that is his tradition," said Durbin.

SUPREME COURT BATTLES PAST

Senate approval of high court nominees by voice vote, without bothering to hold roll calls, was standard for most of the 20th Century. Conservative Antonin Scalia sailed into the Supreme Court by 98-0 in 1986, while liberal Ruth Bader Ginsburg won 96-3 approval seven years later.

There were bitter fights. Democrats blocked conservative Robert Bork's nomination in 1987 and unsuccessfully opposed Clarence Thomas' ascension in 1991 after he was accused of sexual harassment.

Hard feelings intensified in early 2016. McConnell, then majority leader, blocked the Senate from even considering President Barack Obama's pick of Merrick Garland to replace the deceased Scalia. McConnell cited the upcoming presidential election nearly nine months away, infuriating Democrats.

Donald Trump was elected and ultimately filled three vacancies over near-unanimous Democratic opposition.

They opposed Brett Kavanaugh after he was accused of sexually assaulting a woman decades earlier. They voted solidly against Amy Coney Barrett after Trump and McConnell rushed through her nomination when a vacancy occurred just weeks before Election Day 2020, a sprint Democrats called hypocritical.

COVID SPENDING FIGHT, TRANSFORMED

Senators from both parties agreed to a \$10 billion COVID-19 package Monday that President Joe Biden wants for more therapeutics, vaccines and tests. With BA.2, the new omicron variant, washing across the country, it seemed poised for congressional approval.

Hours later, bargainers led by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, seemed blindsided when their compromise was derailed. Republicans wanted to add an extension of an expiring crackdown on migrants crossing the Mexican border that Trump imposed in 2020, citing the pandemic's public health threat.

Many Republicans were skeptical that more COVID-19 money was necessary. But their demand for an immigration amendment transformed a fight over how much more to spend on a disease that's killed 980,000 Americans into a battle over border security, tailor-made for upcoming GOP political campaigns.

Immigration divides Democrats, and Republicans believe the issue can further solidify their chances of winning congressional control in November's elections. Playing defense, Schumer postponed debate on the COVID-19 bill.

Democrats deserved some blame for being outmaneuvered. House Democrats shot down a \$15 billion agreement in March, rejecting compromise budget savings to pay for it.

And in glaringly tone-deaf political timing, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced last week, just as bargainers were finalizing their latest compromise, that the Trump-era immigration curbs would lapse on May 23.

That gave Republicans an irresistible political gift to pursue.

A MODERATE'S FAREWELL

Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., announced his retirement Tuesday. He's the fourth of the 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach Trump last year to say they won't seek reelection.

Upton attributed his departure to running in a new district, but that didn't stop Trump from proclaiming: "UPTON QUILTS! 4 down and 6 to go." The House impeached Trump over his incitement of supporters who attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, but the GOP-run Senate acquitted him.

Now in his 18th term, Upton's departure subtracts another moderate from a GOP that's shifted rightward in recent years, particularly when it comes to showing fealty to Trump.

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The pro-business Upton, 68, was a driving force on one law spurring pharmaceutical development and has worked with Democrats on legislation affecting energy and the auto industry. His work across the aisle and his affability placed him in the ever-smaller group of Republicans who draw Democrats' praise.

"To him, bipartisan and compromise are not forbidden words," said Rep. Debbie Dingell, D-Mich.

PARTY DIFFERENCES, THEN AND NOW

Pitched battles are now habitual over bills financing federal agencies and extending the government's borrowing authority. When those disputes are resolved and federal shutdowns and defaults averted, lawmakers hail as triumphs what is their most rudimentary task — keeping government functioning.

Despite the divisions over COVID-19 money and Jackson, there has also been cooperation.

Congress overwhelmingly voted Thursday to ban Russian oil and downgrade trade relations with that country following its invasion of Ukraine. There's progress on bipartisan trade and technology legislation, and a bipartisan \$1 trillion infrastructure measure became law last year.

North Carolina Senate race tests Trump's endorsement power

By GARY D. ROBERTSON and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — When Ted Budd won a surprise endorsement from former President Donald Trump last year, he was a little-known congressman running for a Senate seat in North Carolina against some of the state's most recognizable Republicans, including a former governor.

As he enters the final stretch before the state's May 17 primary, Budd is again hoping for a boost, banking on the power of Trump's endorsement to put him on top of a field that includes a dozen other Republicans.

"We feel we've got strong momentum," Budd told The Associated Press. "Whether it's grassroots, trend lines in polling or fundraising, we think we're in a very good place."

Budd's candidacy will serve as an early test of whether Trump's backing is powerful enough to lift someone from relative obscurity to the GOP nomination for a critical Senate seat. A strong showing by Budd could provide clues about how Trump-backed candidates in other states, including Georgia, that vote in quick succession after North Carolina, will fare.

The race "will be a test of the Trump effect on North Carolina among North Carolina Republicans, I think not just for North Carolina but nationally," said Mike Rusher, a political consultant who previously worked for the state GOP.

Democrats have made inroads across the South in recent years, winning a presidential election in Georgia in 2020 for the first time in 28 years and picking up two Senate seats.

North Carolina has experienced similar demographic changes, driven by an influx of new residents to the Raleigh and Charlotte areas. But for now, Democrats have struggled to make the same progress in the state's presidential and Senate races. Barack Obama was the last Democratic presidential contender to carry North Carolina in 2008, and a Democrat hasn't won a Senate seat since Kay Hagan the same year.

Trump will return to the state on Saturday for a rally in rural Johnston County, just southeast of Raleigh. He was a boon to North Carolina Republicans in the 2020 campaign, boosting turnout so that GOP candidates — with few exceptions — won races up and down the ballot even as Trump himself only narrowly eked out a win.

Budd is running for retiring Republican Sen. Richard Burr's seat against former Gov. Pat McCrory, who is viewed as a moderate and has kept some distance from Trump while backing his economic policies. A dozen other Republicans are also seeking the nomination, including former U.S. Rep. Mark Walker, who has resisted Trump's entreaties to drop out.

The winner is expected to take on presumptive Democratic nominee Cheri Beasley, a former state Supreme Court chief justice, in November's general election. Like nearly all statewide races, the general election should be close, and a Democratic victory could thwart GOP hopes of retaking the Senate majority.

While McCrory entered the race as its best-known candidate, Budd and his advisers are increasingly optimistic that his position is strengthening in the race's final weeks.

Budd credited Trump's endorsement as "the single biggest factor to help advance and get attention

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on this campaign." He has also benefited from millions of dollars in super PAC spending on his behalf, including from the Club for Growth's political wing. The group's ads heavily feature Trump's endorsement, casting Budd as a reliable conservative while highlighting McCrory's past criticism of the former president and slamming him as a "disloyal, liberal loser."

McCrory became governor in 2013 but lost reelection after he signed a "bathroom bill" targeting transgender people that cost the state billions.

Saturday's rally comes amid questions over whether Trump's influence is fading amid stumbles in other states. Last month, he withdrew his endorsement of Rep. Mo Brooks, who was struggling to gain traction in Alabama's Senate primary. Last year, his endorsed candidate in Pennsylvania's Senate race, Sean Parnell, dropped out amid allegations of abuse by his ex-wife.

As aides have warned that he is setting himself up for failure by offering too many endorsements, Trump has held off picking sides in several competitive Senate contests, including in Missouri and Ohio, where early voting is underway.

Seeing Walker as a potential spoiler, Trump has tried to no avail to pressure him to leave the race — a tactic he has used successfully in other contests to bolster his favored candidates' chances.

The top vote-getter must garner more than 30% of the vote to avoid a runoff. Otherwise, the top two finishers advance to a runoff in late July.

"Look, we appreciate President Trump and the work that he did for our country, but it doesn't mean that he makes the right decisions and sometimes he gets bad counsel," Walker said in an interview. "And in this particular incident, he has hitched his wagon to the wrong horse."

McCrory, meanwhile, dismissed polling out this week suggesting he had lost his early edge, saying there's time for a counterattack.

"This race is going to be a dead heat. It's neck and neck right now, and it's amazing that we're even in that position, considering \$7 to \$8 million have been spent against us from a special interest group in D.C.," McCrory said in an unnamed reference to Club for Growth Action.

Many voters have yet to make up their minds, with early in-person voting beginning April 28.

John Dismukes, 48, of Carolina Beach describes himself as "100% undecided." "I'm looking at all three of them," he said.

Billy Shomaker, a retired commercial pilot from Beech Mountain, said he supports Budd regardless of Trump's endorsement. "I like President Trump. I don't like everything he does," said Shomaker, 68.

Trump's preferred candidates in North Carolina haven't always been successful. In 2020, political newcomer Madison Cawthorn comfortably won a GOP congressional primary runoff over Trump's pick.

But Trump soon embraced Cawthorn, who won the general election at age 25 and became one of the ex-president's strongest supporters. Now, Trump is returning the favor, featuring him as a rally speaker and endorsing him for reelection even as Cawthorn has faced backlash over recent incendiary comments.

McCrory said he's got his own political events Saturday and wouldn't share the stage with Budd, Cawthorn or Trump even if offered.

Trump "says I don't represent his values," McCrory said, referencing the former president's words when he endorsed Budd 10 months ago. "I agree with the policies of Trump. But yeah, we maybe have different opinion on values."

Jackson's speech highlights US race struggles, progress

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

"In my family, it took just one generation to go from segregation to the Supreme Court of the United States."

With those words, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson acknowledged both the struggles and progress of Black Americans in her lifetime.

Her words, delivered from the South Lawn of the White House on Friday, one day after her historic Senate confirmation, were a tribute to generations of Black Americans who she said paved the way for her

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elevation to the nation's highest court.

"I have now achieved something far beyond anything my grandparents could have possibly ever imagined," Jackson said, noting they had gained only grade-school educations before starting their family and later sending their children to racially segregated schools.

"The path was cleared for me, so that I might rise to this occasion," she said. "And in the poetic words of Dr. Maya Angelou, I do so now."

Quoting Angelou's famous poem, "And Still I Rise," Jackson added: "I am the dream and the hope of the slave."

Nina Turner, a former Ohio state senator who was a prominent surrogate for Sen. Bernie Sanders' 2020 Democratic presidential campaign, said Jackson's speech was an awe-inspiring reminder of how far Black Americans have come amid their ongoing struggle.

"Expressing that realization out loud for all of the world to hear, as she is about to take her place as the first Black woman Supreme Court justice, was just magnificent," said Turner.

"It is vitally important that we, as Black people, continue to remind this nation from whence we came," she said. "The pain that it took to get to a 'Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson' could not be understated."

Jackson, a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, said that she has been lucky on her path to the high court. Although her arrival breaks one of the remaining racial barriers in American democracy, many Black Americans still struggle to surmount systemic blocks.

She namechecked the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights icon, as well as Black federal judicial trailblazers such as Justice Thurgood Marshall and Judge Constance Baker Motley, thanking them for their leadership and role modeling.

"For all of the talk of this historic nomination and now confirmation, I think of them as the true path breakers," Jackson said. "I'm just the very lucky first inheritor of the dream of liberty and justice for all."

Melanie L. Campbell, president and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation and convener of the Black Women's Roundtable, watched Jackson's speech from the White House lawn as an invited guest on Friday. With the sun shining through clouds over Washington, there was a palpable joy in the crowd over what Jackson symbolizes for the country, she said.

"It just felt like the ancestors were dancing."

"I can see myself, in now-Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson," Campbell added. "(Jackson) understands the significance of this moment for Black women, for women, for the nation. And it is a game changer."

Others watching the speech also noted the diversity at the event and the image at the center — President Joe Biden flanked by the first Black female Supreme Court justice and the first Black and Asian American vice president.

Just before Vice President Kamala Harris introduced the president, she gushed over what Jackson's confirmation will one day mean to her young, Black goddaughter.

"When I presided over the Senate confirmation vote yesterday, while I was sitting there, I drafted a note to my goddaughter," Harris said. "I told her that I felt such a deep sense of pride and joy about what this moment means for our nation and for her future."

Speaking directly to Jackson, Harris added: "And I will tell you, her braids are just a little longer than yours."

Although the occasion will be noted in history books as a symbol of racial progress, Turner said Jackson's elevation to the Supreme Court should be celebrated by Americans of all races and creeds.

"Not only should the entire Black community be proud, the entire country should be proud because this has certainly been a long time coming," she said. "And from this victory, we certainly have an opportunity to continue to build and create more victories. We're not done yet."

Amazon seeks to overturn union win, says vote was tainted

By HALELUYA HADERO Associated Press

Amazon is seeking to overturn the historic union victory at one of its New York City warehouses, arguing in a legal filing Friday that union organizers and the National Labor Relations Board acted in a way that tainted the results. It now wants to redo the election.

The e-commerce giant listed 25 objections in the filing obtained by The Associated Press, accusing organizers with the nascent Amazon Labor Union of intimidating workers to vote for the union, a claim an attorney representing the group has called "patently absurd."

"The employees have spoken," Eric Milner, the attorney, said in a statement Thursday after Amazon's initial planned objections were made public in another legal filing.

"Amazon is choosing to ignore that, and instead engage in stalling tactics to avoid the inevitable — coming to the bargaining table and negotiating for a contract" on behalf of the workers, he said.

Warehouse workers in Staten Island cast 2,654 votes — or about 55% — in favor of a union, giving the fledgling group enough support to pull off a victory last Friday.

In one objection, Amazon said organizers "intentionally created hostile confrontations in front of eligible voters," by interrupting the mandatory meetings the company held to persuade its employees to reject the union drive. In a filing released earlier this month, the company disclosed it spent about \$4.2 million last year on labor consultants.

In another objection, Amazon targeted organizers' distribution of cannabis to workers, saying the labor board "cannot condone such a practice as a legitimate method of obtaining support for a labor organization." New York legalized the recreational use of marijuana last year for those over 21. Milner, the attorney representing the union, said Amazon is grasping at straws.

Distributing cannabis "is no different than distributing free t-shirts and it certainly did not act to interfere with the election," he said.

The company also accused organizers of improperly polling workers.

The retailer had initially signaled it planned to challenge the election results because of a lawsuit the NLRB filed in March, in which the board sought to force Amazon to reinstate a fired employee who was involved in the union drive.

Amazon pointed to the lawsuit in one of its objections filed Friday, saying the regional NLRB office that brought the suit "failed to protect the integrity and neutrality of its procedures," and had created an impression of support for the union by seeking reinstatement for the former employee, Gerald Bryson.

"Based on the evidence we've seen so far, as set out in our objections, we believe that the actions of the NLRB and the ALU improperly suppressed and influenced the vote, and we think the election should be conducted again so that a fair and broadly representative vote can be had," Kelly Nantel, an Amazon spokesperson, said in a statement Friday.

Bryson was fired in the early days of the pandemic after leading a protest calling for the company to do more to protect workers against COVID-19. While off the job during the protest, Bryson got into a dispute with another worker and was later fired for violating Amazon's vulgar-language policy, according to his attorney Frank Kearl.

The NLRB did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Its spokesperson, Kayla Blado, previously said the independent agency is authorized by Congress to enforce the National Labor Relations Act.

"All NLRB enforcement actions against Amazon have been consistent with that Congressional mandate," she said.

In other objections, Amazon targeted how the labor agency conducted the election. It said the agency failed to control media presence around the voting area and didn't have enough staff and equipment, which the company says created long lines and "discouraged many employees from voting in subsequent polling sessions."

Meanwhile, both Amazon and the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, a union that spearheaded a separate union drive in Bessemer, Alabama, have filed objections to that election. The final

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outcome of the union vote in Alabama is still up in the air with 416 outstanding challenged ballots in the balance. Initial results show the union down by 118 votes, with the majority of Amazon warehouse workers rejecting a bid to form unionize.

RWDSU, which filed more than 20 objections, said in its filing Thursday that its objections are "grounds to set the election aside."

A hearing to review the challenged ballots is expected to begin in the coming weeks.

Missile kills at least 52 at crowded Ukrainian train station

By ADAM SCHRECK and CARA ANNA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A missile hit a train station in eastern Ukraine where thousands had gathered Friday, killing at least 52 and wounding dozens more in an attack on a crowd of mostly women and children trying to flee a new, looming Russian offensive, Ukrainian authorities said.

The attack, denounced by some as yet another war crime in the 6-week-old conflict, came as workers unearthed bodies from a mass grave in Bucha, a town near Ukraine's capital where dozens of killings have been documented after a Russian pullout.

Photos from the station in Kramatorsk showed the dead covered with tarps, and the remnants of a rocket painted with the words "For the children," which in Russian implied that children were being avenged by the strike, though the exact reason remained unclear. About 4,000 civilians had been in and around the station, heeding calls to leave before fighting intensifies in the Donbas region, the office of Ukraine's prosecutor-general said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who says he expects a tough global response, and other leaders accused Russia's military of deliberately attacking the station. Russia, in turn, blamed Ukraine, saying it doesn't use the kind of missile that hit the station — a contention experts dismissed.

Zelenskyy told Ukrainians in his nightly video address Friday that efforts would be taken "to establish every minute of who did what, who gave what orders, where the missile came from, who transported it, who gave the command and how this strike was agreed to."

Pavlo Kyrylenko, the regional governor of Donetsk, in the Donbas, said 52 people were killed, including five children, and dozens more were wounded.

"There are many people in a serious condition, without arms or legs," Kramatorsk Mayor Oleksandr Goncharenko said, adding that the local hospital was struggling to treat everyone.

British Defense Minister Ben Wallace denounced the attack as a war crime, and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called it "completely unacceptable."

"There are almost no words for it," European Union Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, in Ukraine, told reporters. "The cynical behavior (by Russia) has almost no benchmark anymore."

Ukrainian authorities and Western officials have repeatedly accused Russian forces of atrocities in the war that began with a Feb. 24 invasion. More than 4 million Ukrainians have fled the country, and millions more have been displaced. Some of the grisliest evidence has been found in towns around Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, from which Russian President Vladimir Putin's troops pulled back in recent days.

In Bucha, Mayor Anatoliy Fedoruk has said investigators found at least three sites of mass shootings of civilians and were still finding bodies in yards, parks and city squares — 90% of whom were shot.

Russia has falsely claimed that the scenes in Bucha were staged.

On Friday, workers pulled corpses from a mass grave near a church under spitting rain, lining up black body bags in rows in the mud. About 67 people were buried in the grave, according to a statement from Prosecutor-General Iryna Venediktova's office.

"Like the massacres in Bucha, like many other Russian war crimes, the missile attack on Kramatorsk should be one of the charges at the tribunal that must be held," Zelenskyy said, his voice rising in anger late Friday.

He expounded on that theme in an excerpted interview with CBS' "60 Minutes" that aired Friday, citing communications intercepted by the Ukrainian security service.

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"There are (Russian) soldiers talking with their parents about what they stole and who they abducted. There are recordings of (Russian) prisoners of war who admitted to killing people," he said. "There are pilots in prison who had maps with civilian targets to bomb. There are also investigations being conducted based on the remains of the dead."

Zelenskyy's comments echo reporting from Der Spiegel saying Germany's foreign intelligence agency had intercepted Russian military radio traffic in which soldiers may have discussed civilian killings in Bucha. The weekly also reported that the recordings indicated the Russian mercenary Wagner Group was involved in atrocities there.

German government officials would not confirm or deny the report, but two former German ministers filed a war crimes complaint Thursday. Russia has denied that its military was involved in war crimes.

After failing to take Kyiv in the face of stiff resistance, Russian forces have now set their sights on the Donbas, the mostly Russian-speaking, industrial region where Moscow-backed rebels have been fighting Ukrainian forces for eight years and control some areas.

A senior U.S. defense official said Friday that the Pentagon believes some of the retreating units were so badly damaged they are "for all intents and purposes eradicated." The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal military assessments.

The official said the U.S. believes Russia has lost between 15% and 20% of its combat power overall since the war began. While some combat units are withdrawing to be resupplied in Russia, Moscow has added thousands of troops around Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, he said.

The train station hit is in Ukrainian government-controlled territory in the Donbas, but Russia's Defense Ministry accused Ukraine of carrying out the attack. So did the region's Moscow-backed separatists, who work closely with Russian regular troops.

Western experts refuted Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov's assertion that Russian forces "do not use" that type of missile, saying Russia has used it during the war. One analyst added that only Russia would have reason to target railway infrastructure in the Donbas.

"The Ukrainian military is desperately trying to reinforce units in the area ... and the railway stations in that area in Ukrainian-held territory are critical for movement of equipment and people," said Justin Bronk, a research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in London.

Bronk pointed to other occasions when Russian authorities have tried to deflect blame by claiming their forces no longer use an older weapon "to kind of muddy the waters and try and create doubt." He suggested Russia specifically chose the missile type because Ukraine also has it.

A Western official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence, also said Russia's forces have used the missile — and that given the strike's location and impact, it was "likely" Russia's.

Ukrainian officials have almost daily pleaded with Western powers to send more arms, and to further punish Russia with sanctions and exclusion of Russian banks from the global financial system.

NATO nations agreed Thursday to increase their supply of weapons, and Slovakian Prime Minister Eduard Heger announced on a trip to Ukraine on Friday that his country has donated its Soviet-era S-300 air defense system to Ukraine. Zelenskyy had appealed for S-300s to help the country "close the skies" to Russian warplanes and missiles.

American and Slovak officials said the U.S. will then deploy a Patriot missile system to Slovakia.

After meeting with Zelenskyy on Friday, during which he urged the EU to impose a full embargo on Russian oil and gas, von der Leyen gave him a questionnaire that is a first step for applying for EU membership. She said the process for completing the questionnaire could take just weeks — an unusually fast turnaround; Zelenskyy quipped in English that they'd have the answers in a week.

Elsewhere, in anticipation of intensified attacks by Russian forces, hundreds of Ukrainians fled villages that were either under fire or occupied in the southern regions of Mykolaiv and Kherson.

In the northeast's Kharkiv, Lidiya Mezheritska stood in the wreckage of her home after overnight missile strikes turned it to rubble.

"The 'Russian world,' they say," she said, wryly invoking Putin's nationalist justification for invading Ukraine. "People, children, old people, women are dying. I don't have a machine gun. I would definitely

go (fight), regardless of age.”

Shanghai hospital pays the price for China’s COVID response

By HUIZHONG WU and DAKE KANG Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — A series of deaths at a hospital for elderly patients in Shanghai is underscoring the dangerous consequences of China’s stubborn pursuit of a zero-COVID approach amid an escalating outbreak in the city of 26 million people.

Multiple patients have died at the Shanghai Donghai Elderly Care hospital, relatives of patients told The Associated Press. They say their loved ones weren’t properly cared for after caretakers who came into contact with the virus were taken away to be quarantined, in adherence to the strict pandemic regulations, depleting the hospital of staff.

Family members have taken to social media to plea for help and answers and are demanding to see surveillance video from inside the facility after getting little to no information from the hospital.

The conditions and deaths at the hospital are a sharp rebuke against China’s strategy of sticking to a zero-COVID policy as it deals with the outbreak in Shanghai in which most of the infected people don’t have symptoms. With a focus on forcing positive cases and close contacts into designated collective quarantine facilities, the costs of zero-COVID may be outweighing the risk of getting sick.

Shen Peiming, 71, was one such casualty. She died Sunday morning at the hospital, without any relatives by her side. A family member said they have been calling the hospital non-stop to find out the circumstances of Shen’s death, but have not gotten a clear answer. “How many times have there been lockdowns since 2020? They still don’t have experience managing this?” the family member said.

All they know is her doctor and nurses had not been there to care for Shen, who was partially paralyzed after a stroke. Her last nursing assistant had been quarantined for being a close contact of a positive case, the relative said, speaking on condition of anonymity out of fear of retribution. An unfamiliar worker called to inform them of her death. Later, the hospital said it was due to a chest infection.

The hospital had a COVID-19 outbreak, the family heard from orderlies, but Shen had tested negative as of last week.

Shanghai authorities have reported no deaths from this outbreak, but questions have been raised about the reliability of the data. A city health official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the topic, said that the criteria for confirming cases and deaths are very strict and susceptible to political meddling.

It is unclear how many patients have died at the hospital, and whether any died of COVID-19. Families say they are talking with other families whose relatives have also died. An article from Chinese news outlet Caixin describing the deaths and infections was taken down shortly after it was published, apparently targeted by censors. Calls to the main office of Donghai Elderly Care went unanswered. The Shanghai government did not respond to a faxed request for comment.

Most experts agree that China’s zero-COVID approach was highly successful in keeping deaths to a minimum when there were limited drugs or vaccines. But now that shots are widely available in China, and with the advent of the omicron variant, many say the government should abandon the policy and focus medical resources on the elderly and vulnerable instead.

Instead, Shanghai has locked down its 26 million people and carried out repeated mass testing to tackle an outbreak driven by the highly contagious omicron BA.2 variant. On Saturday, the city reported more than 23,000 new local cases, of which only 1,015 had symptoms.

“If you’re asymptomatic, what’s going to hurt you?” said Ray Yip, the founding director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control office in China, who maintains close ties with Chinese health officials. “The only people who get sick are those with diabetes, obesity, chronic disease, old people. Protect those people. You can protect them.”

A low vaccination rate among the elderly, though, remains a concern. Only 62% of Shanghai residents over 60 have been vaccinated, according to the latest data available. Some experts support the strict ap-

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proach, saying China needs to raise that rate before it can safely live with the virus.

The U.S. guidelines for asymptomatic cases, as in the U.K., are that individuals isolate at home for five days. In Shanghai, workers are rushing to set up massive temporary facilities in exhibition halls and elsewhere to try to house everyone who tests positive.

The citywide lockdown has disrupted daily life and the economy. Many residents, trapped in their apartment buildings, are scrambling to buy food through apps and place bulk orders with neighbors. Some in quarantine have posted videos showing chaotic scenes of people rushing to get food and a lack of clean toilets. Others have posted pleas for relatives who need medicine urgently.

The U.S. said Friday that it is allowing the voluntary departure of non-essential personnel and family members from its consulate in Shanghai because of the situation.

The government has trumpeted its success in curbing COVID-19, touting it as evidence of the superiority of China's governing system — especially compared to Western democracies, where deaths have far exceeded China's. That narrative, experts said, is making it difficult for Beijing to switch tactics.

"They bragged too hard to their own people about how wonderful they are, and now they've painted themselves into a corner," said Yip. "The only way they can control Shanghai now is to repeat what they did in Wuhan."

The 11 million residents of Wuhan were locked down for more than two months at the start of the pandemic in 2020.

Shanghai's lockdown is an abrupt about-face from just a month ago, when some Chinese health experts publicly suggested softening pandemic control measures.

The city's economic importance and advanced healthcare system left officials reluctant to impose strict measures and confident about combating any outbreaks. Further, Chinese leader Xi Jinping ordered that ongoing outbreaks in China be controlled at "minimum cost" in mid-March, emphasizing Beijing's desire to protect the economy while curbing the virus.

Shanghai took targeted steps, locking down individual office buildings, shopping centers and neighborhoods for 48 hours at a time but otherwise allowing life to go on as usual.

With the soft measures, the city's case count rose. The outbreak spilled over to at least 71 other cities, according to a notice posted by Guangxi province in southern China, and pressure grew for harsher measures.

On March 28, the city started an eight-day lockdown in two phases, which has since evolved into a citywide one with no end in sight.

"There is no time to waste," Chinese Vice Premier Sun Chunlan said on a visit to the city last weekend, according to a government statement. "We need to move forward faster and harder to provide strong support for the elimination of cases in society."

The actions sent nurses and doctors into quarantine, causing conditions to worsen at Donghai Elderly Care.

Chen Jielei said the outbreak at the hospital infected her unvaccinated, partially paralyzed 81-year-old mother. Because staff members also fell ill, her mother wasn't served meals on time and her sheets were unchanged for days. After a few days, a replacement worker started taking care of her.

A college professor who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was afraid of retribution, said his family wasn't notified for more than a day after his 82-year-old father died on March 31. His last contact was on March 28 with a nursing assistant who called to warn there were positive cases and they could no longer take care of his father.

"In those three days, what happened to my father? What kind of mistreatment did he suffer?" he asked. His father's condition had been stable on March 28 when he spoke with the nursing assistant.

Shen had lived on and off in the hospital for three years after her stroke. Family members visited every week. But visits were banned in early March as the COVID-19 outbreak spread through Shanghai, the relative said.

They were not worried initially because the hospital had always been very responsive and they were in contact with the nursing assistants who took care of Shen. But one orderly warned on March 26 there

were positive cases and many of Donghai's staff were being quarantined.

The hospital hired temporary nursing assistants, but many did not have healthcare experience, one nursing assistant said.

The woman, who gave only her last name of Zhang, said an employment agency told her it was a cleaning job.

"They said your work is just to clean, you won't even have to wear a protective suit. But what they said was completely different from what I had to do," she said.

Shen needed to be assisted with eating through a tube by having her food blended into a liquid. She also had a tube in her throat that had to be disinfected each day.

"In the past, if there was an issue, they'd always call me. This time, there wasn't even a voice message, and she died so suddenly," the relative said. Now the hospital is asking the families to sign a form to cremate the deceased. Shen's relative said the family will refuse until they get a clear answer.

The hospital sent an apology letter Wednesday to some of the families. The AP has viewed a copy.

"Because of the outbreak's emergency, and many of the seniors had not been vaccinated, this caused those with severe underlying illness and weak health to die," it said.

While Chinese government researchers have begun exploring ways to end zero-COVID, the government continues to punish officials with large outbreaks on their turfs.

"The space for discussion is now eliminated," said Yanzhong Huang, a public health expert at the Council for Foreign Relations in the U.S. "The message is loud and clear: zero-COVID, no exceptions."

Whitmer kidnap plot: 2 men acquitted, hung jury for 2 more

By JOHN FLESHER and ED WHITE Associated Press

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — A jury acquitted two men of all charges in a plot to kidnap Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer but couldn't reach verdicts against the two alleged leaders, a stunning defeat for the government after a weekslong trial that centered on a remarkable FBI sting operation just before the 2020 election.

Whitmer did not immediately comment on Friday's outcome, though her chief of staff was critical, saying Americans are "living through the normalization of political violence."

The result was announced on the fifth day of deliberations, a few hours after the jury said it had been struggling to find unanimity on charges in the 10-count indictment. The judge told the panel to keep working, but jurors emerged again after lunch to say they still were deadlocked on some counts.

Daniel Harris, 24, and Brandon Caserta, 33, were found not guilty of conspiracy. In addition, Harris was acquitted of charges related to explosives and a gun.

The jury could not reach verdicts for Adam Fox, 38, and Barry Croft Jr., 46, which means the government can put them on trial again for two conspiracy charges. Croft also faces a separate explosives charge. They'll remain in custody.

No juror spoke publicly about the mixed result.

"Obviously we're disappointed with the outcome. ... We have two defendants that are awaiting trial and we'll get back to work on that," U.S. Attorney Andrew Birge said.

Harris and Caserta embraced their lawyers when U.S. District Judge Robert Jonker said they were free after 18 months in jail awaiting trial. Family members moments earlier gasped and cried with joy when the verdicts were read.

The arrests in Michigan came amid upheaval in the U.S. in 2020. The year had started with pandemic lockdowns then shifted to armed Capitol protests over COVID-19 restrictions ordered by Whitmer and other governors. By late May, anger over racial injustice and the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police erupted into demonstrations in cities nationwide.

In a Grand Rapids courtroom, during 13 days of testimony, prosecutors offered evidence from undercover agents, a crucial informant and two men who pleaded guilty to the plot. Jurors also read and heard secretly recorded conversations, violent social media posts and chat messages.

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Ty Garbin, who pleaded guilty and is serving a six-year prison sentence, said the plan was to get Whitmer and cause enough chaos to trigger a civil war before the election, keeping Joe Biden from winning the presidency.

Garbin and Kaleb Franks, who also pleaded guilty and testified for the government, were among the six who were arrested in October 2020 amid talk of raising \$4,000 for an explosive to blow up a bridge and stymie any police response to a kidnapping, according to trial testimony.

Prosecutors said the group was steeped in anti-government extremism and furious over Whitmer's pandemic restrictions. There was evidence of a crudely built "shoot house" to practice going in and out of her vacation home, and a night ride by Croft, Fox and covert operatives to check the property.

But defense lawyers portrayed the men as credulous weekend warriors, often stoned on marijuana and prone to big, wild talk. They said FBI agents and informants tricked and cajoled the men into targeting the governor.

During closing arguments a week ago, Fox's attorney, Christopher Gibbons, said the plan was "utter nonsense," and he pleaded with jurors to be the "firewall" against the government.

Harris was the only defendant to testify in his own defense, repeatedly telling jurors "absolutely not" when asked if he had targeted the governor.

"I think what the FBI did is unconscionable," Caserta's attorney, Michael Hills, said outside court. "And I think the jury just sent them a message loud and clear that these tactics — we're not going to condone what they've done here."

He said Whitmer was "never in any danger."

Gibbons said the acquittals of Harris and Caserta demonstrated serious shortcomings in the government's case.

"We'll be ready for another trial. ... We'll eventually get what we wanted out of this, which is the truth and the justice I think Adam is entitled to," Gibbons said.

Meanwhile, Michigan Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist said the "outcome is disappointing." Whitmer's office released a tough reaction from the governor's chief of staff, JoAnne Huls.

"The plot to kidnap and kill a governor may seem like an anomaly. But we must be honest about what it really is: The result of violent, divisive rhetoric that is all too common across our country," Huls said. "There must be accountability and consequences for those who commit heinous crimes. Without accountability, extremists will be emboldened."

Deliberations resumed earlier Friday with a court employee handing jurors a large plastic bag containing pennies, known as evidence exhibit 291. The pennies were requested before jurors went home Thursday.

Pennies taped to a commercial-grade firework were intended to act like shrapnel against Whitmer's security team, according to the government.

The trial covered 20 days since March 8, including jury selection, evidence, final arguments and jury deliberations. Croft is from Bear, Delaware, while the others are from Michigan.

Whitmer, a Democrat, wasn't a trial witness and didn't attend. She 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.

A jury of six women and six men heard the case, as well as four alternates. Little is known about them. Citing privacy, Jonker ordered that they be only identified by numbers. Two jurors were dismissed during the trial because of illness.

The jury pool was drawn from a 22-county region in western and northern Michigan that is largely rural, Republican and conservative. Several people were dismissed after saying they had strong feelings about Whitmer — positive or negative — or the government.

Matthew Schneider, a former U.S. attorney in Detroit, believes prosecutors "could have done a better job" of learning about the backgrounds and personal views of some jurors who were called up near the end of the all-day selection process.

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"The government had laid out its case. The jury didn't believe it," Schneider said of the verdict. Separately, authorities in state court are prosecuting eight men who are accused of aiding the group that was on trial in federal court.

CNN: Trump Jr. text shows ideas to overturn 2020 election

By LOU KESTEN and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump Jr. texted White House chief of staff Mark Meadows two days after the 2020 presidential election with strategies for overturning the result if Trump's father lost, CNN reported Friday.

The text was sent two days before Joe Biden was declared the winner, according to CNN. It reportedly laid out strategies that then-President Donald Trump's team pursued in the following months as they disseminated misinformation about election fraud and pressured state and federal officials to assist in that effort.

The cable news network reported that Trump Jr.'s text made "specific reference to filing lawsuits and advocating recounts to prevent certain swing states from certifying their results." It also suggested that if those measures didn't work, lawmakers in Congress could dismiss the electoral results and vote to keep President Trump in office.

Trump Jr.'s lawyer Alan S. Futerfas, in a statement Friday to CNN, said: "After the election, Don received numerous messages from supporters and others. Given the date, this message likely originated from someone else and was forwarded."

CNN said the Trump Jr. text had been obtained by the House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol. In the last week, the committee has interviewed former President Trump's daughter Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner. Their virtual testimonies are the closest lawmakers have gotten to the former president.

Separately on Friday, Ali Alexander, a conservative activist who helped found the "Stop the Steal" movement, said he had received a subpoena to provide testimony to a federal grand jury as part of the Justice Department's wide investigation into the insurrection.

In a statement through his attorney, Alexander said the subpoena was seeking information about the "Save America Rally" that was held at the Ellipse — hosted by the pro-Trump nonprofit organization called Women for America First — which thousands had attended before a surge of Trump supporters stormed into the Capitol on Jan. 6.

"I don't believe I have information that will be useful to them but I'm cooperating as best I can further reiterating that I'm not a target because I did nothing wrong," he said.

Alexander voluntarily appeared for hours in December before the House panel investigating the insurrection, providing congressional investigators with a slew of documents and information about his communications with lawmakers.

In court documents, Alexander's lawyers have said he told congressional investigators that he remembers having "a few phone conversations" with Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., and had exchanged some text messages with Rep. Mo Brooks, R-Ala., in the run-up to the Jan. 6 rallies.

"I did nothing wrong and I am not in possession of evidence that anyone else had plans to commit unlawful acts," Alexander said. "I denounce anyone who planned to subvert my permitted event and the other permitted events of that day on Capitol grounds to stage any counterproductive activities."

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By JOHN FLESHER and ED WHITE Associated Press

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Trans kids fear Alabama laws targeting medicine, bathrooms

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Ninth grader Harleigh Walker, 15, spends her time after school like many girls her age: doing homework, listening to Taylor Swift, collecting records and hanging out with friends.

But this year, her spring break also included trying to persuade members of the state House and Senate to reject legislation banning gender-affirming medications for transgender kids like her under 19.

She was unsuccessful. On Thursday, Alabama lawmakers passed the measure, and Gov. Kay Ivey signed it into law on Friday, meaning Harleigh's doctor would face prison time if she continued to prescribe her testosterone-blocking drugs.

"Honestly, I'm a little scared now," Harleigh said Thursday after learning the bill had passed. "But we're still going to fight, no matter what."

She said she is holding out hope the bill will be blocked by a court.

Alabama is among multiple states with Republican-controlled legislatures that have advanced bills not only to block medical treatment but to ban transgender children from using school restrooms or playing on sports teams that don't correspond with their sex at birth. The Alabama medication bill is one of the most far-reaching: It would put doctors in prison for up to 10 years for prescribing puberty blockers or hormonal treatment to trans kids under 19.

"I believe very strongly that if the Good Lord made you a boy, you are a boy, and if he made you a girl, you are a girl," said Ivey, who faces a May primary with conservative opponents trying to outflank her on her right. "We should especially protect our children from these radical, life-altering drugs and surgeries when they are at such a vulnerable stage in life. Instead, let us all focus on helping them to properly develop into the adults God intended them to be."

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Ivey also signed a separate measure that requires students to use bathrooms that align with their original birth certificate and prohibits instruction of gender and sexual identity in kindergarten through fifth grades.

Cathryn Oakley, state legislative director and senior counsel for the Human Rights Campaign, a national advocacy group for the LGBTQ community, called the new laws "breathtakingly cruel and cowardly" and "the single most anti-transgender legislative package in history." Groups on Friday vowed to quickly file a lawsuit challenging the measures in court.

Oakley and other opponents say transgender health is being used as a deliberate political wedge issue to motivate a voting base — in the same way they say bills about critical race theory have been employed. Critical race theory is a way of thinking about America's history through the lens of racism. Numerous Republican-controlled legislatures have proposed bills to block its teaching in public schools.

The measures have prompted swift backlash from medical experts, Democratic President Joe Biden's administration, the U.S. Department of Justice and the families of trans youth. Last month, the Justice department sent a letter to all 50 state attorneys general, warning them that blocking transgender and nonbinary youth from receiving gender-affirming care could be an infringement of federal constitutional protections.

"My child is not a political tool. This is not a fair fight to pick on vulnerable children," said Vanessa Finney Tate, the mother of a 13-year-old trans boy in Birmingham, Alabama, after testifying at a public legislative hearing on bill that would block students from using bathrooms corresponding to their gender.

Harleigh's father, Jeff Walker notes that many of the same Alabama lawmakers who supported the ban on gender-affirming medical treatment recently argued, 'It's your body and your choice' regarding coronavirus vaccinations. He said the family is now scrambling to find another state where it can continue Harleigh's medical care.

"We just don't want people meddling in our medical care," he said.

Medical groups including The American Academy of Pediatrics have publicly opposed efforts to outlaw gender-affirming care.

"Gender-affirming care benefits the health and psychological functioning of transgender and gender-diverse youth," the Endocrine Society said in a statement. "When an individual's gender identity is not respected and they cannot access medical care, it can result in higher psychological problem scores and can raise the person's risk of committing suicide or other acts of self-harm."

The organization notes that only reversible puberty blockers are recommended for younger adolescents, while older adolescents might qualify for hormone therapy.

Harleigh received the medication — which stops her from going through male puberty — only after consulting with a team of doctors for years. She said it's "weird" to see lawmakers with no medical experience call her medication "child abuse," when six doctors have agreed she should have it.

Angus, a 16-year-old trans teen who requested that his last name not be used because of the bullying he has received in his north Alabama town, said he knew at puberty that the mirror reflected "a body that wasn't my own."

After coming out to his mother, he began slowly testing the waters: dressing as a man, changing his name. Only after years of talking to a team of doctors, was he able to recently get medications to stop his periods. The next step, which he is eager to start, would be a small dose of testosterone.

"I have been waiting for seven years to finally become a man, the man that I've always known I am," Angus said.

He said bills to block such treatments are harming, not protecting trans youth.

"The government is saying, 'Oh, parents are abusing their children by letting them transition,'" he said. "Actually, it's more child abuse to not let them transition if they come out. What these bills really are doing is putting trans youth lives at risk because these suicide rates will spike exponentially. And a lot of families will lose their children."

Similar bans are moving forward in other states.

In Texas, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has ordered the state's child welfare agency to investigate abuse reports of gender-confirming care for kids. And a law in Arkansas bans gender-affirming medica-

tions. That law has been blocked by a court, however.

Trans youth in many red states say they feel attacked, angry, betrayed and scared by the wave of legislation aimed at them.

"It feels like a back-stab," Harleigh said. "I've lived in this state my whole life. For them to just say, 'Well, you know what, this is an issue that's really popular on my side of the aisle so I'm just going to raise it up and support it because it'll help me win my election' — It just hurts to see them do that."

Jackson's speech highlights US race struggles, progress

By AARON MORRISON Associated Press

"In my family, it took just one generation to go from segregation to the Supreme Court of the United States."

With those words, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson acknowledged both the struggles and progress of Black Americans in her lifetime.

Her words, delivered from the South Lawn of the White House on Friday, one day after her historic Senate confirmation, were a tribute to generations of Black Americans who she said paved the way for her elevation to the nation's highest court.

"I have now achieved something far beyond anything my grandparents could have possibly ever imagined," Jackson said, noting they had gained only grade school educations before starting their family and later sending their children to racially segregated schools.

"The path was cleared for me, so that I might rise to this occasion," she said. "And in the poetic words of Dr. Maya Angelou, I do so now."

Quoting Angelou's famous poem, "And Still I Rise," Jackson added: "I am the dream and the hope of the slave."

Nina Turner, a former Ohio state senator who was a prominent surrogate for Sen. Bernie Sanders' 2020 Democratic presidential campaign, said Jackson's speech was an awe-inspiring reminder of how far Black Americans have come amid their ongoing struggle.

"Expressing that realization out loud for all of the world to hear, as she is about to take her place as the first Black woman Supreme Court justice, was just magnificent," said Turner.

"It is vitally important that we, as Black people, continue to remind this nation from whence we came," she said. "The pain that it took to get to a 'Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson' could not be understated."

Jackson, a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, said that she has been lucky on her path to the high court. Although her arrival breaks one of the remaining racial barriers in American democracy, many Black Americans still struggle to surmount systemic blocks.

She namechecked the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the civil rights icon, as well as Black federal judicial trailblazers such as Justice Thurgood Marshall and Judge Constance Baker Motley, thanking them for their leadership and role modeling.

"For all of the talk of this historic nomination and now confirmation, I think of them as the true path breakers," Jackson said. "I'm just the very lucky first inheritor of the dream of liberty and justice for all."

Melanie L. Campbell, president and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation and convener of the Black Women's Roundtable, watched Jackson's speech from the White House lawn as an invited guest on Friday. With the sun shining through clouds over Washington, there was a palpable joy in the crowd over what Jackson symbolizes for the country, she said.

"It just felt like the ancestors were dancing."

"I can see myself, in now-Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson," Campbell added. "(Jackson) understands the significance of this moment for Black women, for women, for the nation. And it is a game changer."

Others watching the speech also noted the diversity at the event and the image at the center — President Joe Biden flanked by the first Black female Supreme Court justice and the first Black and Asian American vice president.

Just before Vice President Kamala Harris introduced the president, she gushed over what Jackson's

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confirmation will one day mean to her young, Black goddaughter.

"When I presided over the Senate confirmation vote yesterday, while I was sitting there, I drafted a note to my goddaughter," Harris said. "I told her that I felt such a deep sense of pride and joy about what this moment means for our nation and for her future."

Speaking directly to Jackson, Harris added: "And I will tell you, her braids are just a little longer than yours."

Although the occasion will be noted in history books as a symbol of racial progress, Turner said Jackson's elevation to the Supreme Court should be celebrated by Americans of all races and creeds.

"Not only should the entire Black community be proud, the entire country should be proud because this has certainly been a long time coming," she said. "And from this victory, we certainly have an opportunity to continue to build and create more victories. We're not done yet."

Will Smith gets 10-year Oscars ban over Chris Rock slap

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The motion picture academy on Friday banned Will Smith from attending the Oscars or any other academy event for 10 years following his slap of Chris Rock at the Academy Awards.

The move comes after a meeting of the academy's Board of Governors to discuss a response to Smith's actions.

"The 94th Oscars were meant to be a celebration of the many individuals in our community who did incredible work this past year; however, those moments were overshadowed by the unacceptable and harmful behavior we saw Mr. Smith exhibit on stage," the academy said in a statement.

"I accept and respect the Academy's decision," Smith said in response. He pre-emptively resigned from the academy last week during the run-up to the meeting, calling his actions "shocking, painful, and inexcusable."

Smith will keep the Oscar he won after the slap, and he will remain eligible to be nominated for and to win more of them in the 10-year period, though he can't show up to accept them.

The academy also apologized for its handling of the situation and allowing Smith to stay and accept his best actor award for "King Richard."

"During our telecast, we did not adequately address the situation in the room. For this, we are sorry," the academy said. "This was an opportunity for us to set an example for our guests, viewers and our Academy family around the world, and we fell short — unprepared for the unprecedented."

In a statement in the days following the Oscars, the academy said Smith was asked to leave the ceremony but refused.

But it's not clear how the message was delivered to Smith or what form it took, and several media outlets reported that he was never formally told to leave the Dolby Theatre. The Los Angeles Times reported in a story Thursday that Oscars producer Will Packer told Smith: "Officially, we don't want you to leave. We want you to stay."

The ban means Smith will not be presenting one of the major awards at next year's Oscars, as is tradition for the best actor winner.

The academy in its Friday statement also expressed "deep gratitude to Mr. Rock for maintaining his composure under extraordinary circumstances."

The academy has not revoked Oscars from expelled members Harvey Weinstein or Roman Polanski.

With his resignation last week, Smith lost the ability to vote for nominees and winners. Smith has been nominated for four Oscars, winning once.

At the March 27 Academy Awards, Rock came out to present the best documentary award and made jokes about several attendees, including Smith's wife, Jada Pinkett Smith.

"Jada, I love you. 'G.I. Jane 2,' can't wait to see it," Rock said.

Pinkett Smith, who has spoken publicly about her hair loss condition, alopecia, had a closely shaved head similar to that of Demi Moore in the 1997 movie.

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Smith strode from his front-row seat on to the stage and smacked Rock, stunning the comedian, the theater crowd and viewers at home.

Many thought it was a planned gag set up by the show or the men themselves, but the seriousness of the situation set in after Smith returned to his seat and angrily twice shouted at Rock to "keep my wife's name out your (expletive) mouth."

Rock said he had no interest in pursuing charges when asked by police backstage.

Smith took the stage again less than hour later to accept his Oscar, tearfully apologizing to the academy but notably omitting any mention of Rock. He compared himself to Richard Williams, the man he played in "King Richard," "a fierce defender of his family."

Later that night, Smith danced with his trophy and his family and rapped along with his own songs in celebration of his win at the Vanity Fair post-Oscars party.

Rock has only briefly addressed the attack publicly, saying at one comedy concert in Boston this week that he was still "kind of processing what happened."

Police official on leave amid probe over Ronald Greene death

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Under increasing pressure from lawmakers, the head of the Louisiana State Police put his second-in-command on leave Friday while he faces an internal probe into the erasing of his cellphone data amid the investigation into the deadly 2019 arrest of Black motorist Ronald Greene.

Superintendent Col. Lamar Davis released a statement saying he placed Lt. Col. Doug Cain on paid administrative leave "to eliminate any questions into the integrity of the investigation."

Cain was among three top state police officials who had their cellphones "sanitized" amid the ongoing probes into Greene's death, which troopers initially blamed on a car crash at the end of a high-speed chase. But long-withheld body-camera video published by The Associated Press last year instead showed white troopers stunning, punching and dragging Greene as he wailed, "I'm your brother! I'm scared! I'm scared!"

Cain's refusal to answer questions about the wiping and the fact that he was staying on the job amid the probe frustrated and angered members of a bipartisan legislative committee that has been conducting hearings into the state's response to Greene's death and whether there was a cover-up.

"This is an attempt to not be transparent. ... If we trusted you we wouldn't be here right now," state Rep. Tanner Magee, the Republican chairman of the committee, told Cain in a hearing last month.

"I have nothing to hide," Cain said. "I didn't do anything wrong."

Davis added to the committee's frustration in a hearing Thursday, telling the panel that the internal probe into Cain's phone would take several more weeks to complete, and that investigators have yet to interview Cain because "we want to interview everybody else in that process first to make sure we get as much information as possible."

Magee questioned why it has to be so complicated, saying it should boil down to simple questions: "What's on the phone and why'd you do it?"

"I do believe in due process, but I do believe that he should be on administrative leave," said Rep. Denise Marcelle, a Baton Rouge Democrat.

State police have acknowledged that the department also "sanitized" the cellphone of the former head of the agency, Col. Kevin Reeves, after he abruptly retired in 2020 amid AP's initial reporting on Greene's death. The agency said it did the same to the phone of another former police commander, Mike Noel, who resigned from a regulatory post last year as he was set to be questioned about the case by lawmakers. Police have said such erasures are policy.

Nearly three years after Greene's May 10, 2019, death along a rural roadside in northeast Louisiana, no one has been criminally charged.

A federal civil rights investigation into the case has gone on for two and a half years, looking not only at the troopers but whether top brass obstructed justice to protect the officers from prosecution. One supervisor recently told the legislative committee that his bosses instructed him not to give prosecutors

the body-camera footage of Greene's arrest.

Probes have also expanded into a string of other state police beatings of mostly Black motorists. An AP investigation last year found Greene's was among at least a dozen cases over the past decade in which state police troopers or their bosses ignored or concealed evidence of beatings, deflected blame and impeded efforts to root out misconduct.

Union Parish District Attorney John Belton told the legislative committee Thursday that U.S. Justice Department prosecutors have dropped their request for him to hold off on a state prosecution until the federal investigation is complete. He says he is now "moving swiftly" to empanel a special grand jury to pursue possible state charges in the Greene case.

The legislative committee was convened in February after an AP report showed Gov. John Bel Edwards was informed within hours that troopers arresting Greene had engaged in a "violent, lengthy struggle." Yet the Democrat stayed mostly silent on the case for two years as state troopers told Greene's family and wrote in reports that he died as the result of a car crash. He has since come to describe the actions of the troopers in Greene's arrest as criminal and racist.

Test taker gets prison; coach convicted in admissions scam

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A former Florida prep school administrator was sentenced to federal prison and a decorated water polo coach at the University of Southern California was swiftly convicted by a jury in a busy Friday in Boston federal court in the long running college admissions bribery scandal.

Mark Riddell, who was paid handsomely to take college entrance exams for wealthy students, was handed a four-month prison sentence, ordered to serve two years of supervised release and forfeit nearly \$240,000.

Meanwhile, former USC coach Jovan Vavic, who faked the athletic credentials of rich students so they could gain admission, was convicted on all three counts of fraud and bribery he faced after a jury deliberated less than a day following his nearly monthlong trial.

U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts Rachael Rollins said the verdict in Vavic's trial represents the final conviction in the headline grabbing case dubbed "Operation Varsity Blues."

The investigation announced in 2019 exposed corruption in the college admissions process at Yale, Stanford, Georgetown and other sought-after schools, and implicated wealthy and connected parents, including actors Felicity Huffman and Lori Loughlin and Loughlin's fashion designer husband, Mossimo Giannulli.

"To say the conduct in this case was reprehensible is an understatement," Rollins said afterward, acknowledging the sprawling investigation preceded her taking office earlier this year. "The rich, powerful and famous — dripping with privilege and entitlement — used their money and clout to steal college admissions spots from more qualified and deserving students."

Joseph Bonavolonta, head of the FBI's Boston office, said he hoped "many important lessons" were learned from the investigation and that colleges make sure the proper safeguards are in place.

"First and foremost, you can't pay to play and lie and cheat to circumvent the college admissions process," he said. "Because you will get caught."

Vavic, a 60-year-old, who guided USC's men's and women's water polo teams to 16 national championships, strode out of the courtroom Friday with his family, declining to comment on the verdict.

Prosecutors said he received about \$250,000 in bribes for designating unqualified students as water polo recruits so they could attend the elite Los Angeles school.

But lawyers for Vavic argued he was just doing what he could to raise money for his dominant, championship-winning program as athletic officials had demanded. They maintained he never lied, never took a bribe and was a victim of USC's desire to cover up a "pervasive culture" of accepting wealthy students who could provide donation windfalls.

The university, which fired Vavic after his 2019 arrest, has stressed its admissions processes are "not on trial."

In a separate courtroom just minutes after Vavic's verdict was read, Riddell was contrite as he faced

sentencing on fraud and money laundering conspiracy charges.

The Harvard graduate, who emerged as a key figure in the wide-ranging scandal, apologized to the many students that lost out on college opportunities because of his "terrible decision."

He said he brought shame to his family and pleaded for leniency for cooperating with law enforcement officials and for committing to make amends now and going forward for his actions.

Riddell's lawyers said he should serve one to two months in prison because he was neither the ringleader of the scheme nor a university insider, like the coaches and college administrators implicated. They also noted he's already paid nearly \$166,000 toward the forfeiture obligation.

Judge Nathaniel Gorton, however, sided with prosecutors who had argued for the four-month sentence. He said Riddell played a key role for many years in the scheme by secretly taking the ACT and SAT for students, or correcting their answers.

"And for what?" the judge said. "You did not need the money. How could you have stooped so low?"

'Get used to it': Outbreaks give taste of living with virus

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

The U.S. is getting a first glimpse of what it's like to experience COVID-19 outbreaks during this new phase of living with the virus, and the roster of the newly infected is studded with stars.

Cabinet members, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Broadway actors and the governors of New Jersey and Connecticut have all tested positive. Outbreaks at Georgetown University and Johns Hopkins University are bringing back mask requirements to those campuses as officials seek out quarantine space.

The known infections likely reveal only the tip of the iceberg — with actors and politicians regularly tested at work. Official case figures are certain to be vast undercounts of how widely the virus is circulating because of home testing and mildly sick not bothering to test at all.

Across the nation, mask-wearing is at its lowest level since April 2020, said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle. For every 100 infections, only seven are recorded in official tallies, according to his modeling group's latest estimate. That means a place like New York City that's averaging 1,600 cases a day has a dramatically higher true number of infections.

Mokdad expects the high level of U.S. immunity built up from previous infections and vaccinations will protect the nation from a large surge.

"We're going to have some infections here and there, but it's not going to shut down the country," Mokdad said. "Life has to go on. We have to be vaccinated and boosted. We need to protect the vulnerable, but we have to get used to it."

On Broadway, several performances of the comedy "Plaza Suite" were canceled after Matthew Broderick tested positive, followed by his wife and co-star, Sarah Jessica Parker. Daniel Craig, too, has been sidelined from his revival of "Macbeth."

Large indoor gatherings with masks optional have led to infections, with a high-profile party in Washington, D.C., now seen as a possible super-spreader event. Other infection clusters outside of groups that are regularly tested might go undetected, said Josh Michaud, associate director of global health policy with the Kaiser Family Foundation in Washington.

"It's harder now than it was before to know what's happening. The future is a little fuzzier because we don't have as much information at our fingertips," Michaud said. "If you're not an actor in a Broadway play or a politician you might fall through the testing cracks."

The public health response will vary from community to community based on what's happening locally, Michaud said.

"We're fighting smaller fires instead of a raging blaze across the country and those smaller fires can be disruptive," Michaud said. "It leaves everyone to choose their own adventure when it comes to pandemic response and individual behaviors."

In Washington D.C., the outbreak has been particularly high profile — striking multiple Cabinet secretaries and Congress members along with Mayor Muriel Bowser and the president of Georgetown University.

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At least a dozen of those infections can be traced to the Gridiron Club dinner, an annual fixture of the D.C. social calendar that took place Saturday for the first time in three years. The dinner is an example of a return to near-total normality that's taking place around the country, leading to a spike in positive tests, but not necessarily a corresponding spike in serious illnesses or hospitalizations.

Washington, D.C., like much of the rest of the country, has greatly relaxed its COVID-19 stance in recent weeks. Bowser has allowed vaccination and indoor masking mandates to expire, and the city health department stopped reporting daily virus numbers in early March. Attendees at the Gridiron Club dinner, which Bowser did not attend, had to provide proof of vaccination, but otherwise no masking or social distancing protocols were observed.

And other staples of the D.C. social calendar are also back to normal. The city's annual Cherry Blossom Festival has been going for weeks — with dozens of associated events, including a parade scheduled for Saturday.

Amid that general return to pre-pandemic behavior, there are a few cautionary steps backward. Georgetown University announced it would reintroduce its indoor mask mandate amid rising infection numbers that include university President John DeGioia

Georgetown's Chief Public Health Officer Ranit Mishori, in announcing the new restrictions, described the infection spike as "significant" — particularly among undergraduates. "Thankfully, with the vast majority of our community up to date on vaccination, we are not seeing cases involving severe illness," Mishori wrote.

D.C. health chief Dr. LaQuandra Nesbitt, in comments to reporters this week, has pointed to the ongoing low level of hospitalizations as proof that the vaccinations have successfully limited the severity of the illness.

Virus metrics in Washington have crept up in the past month according to the city health department. The weekly case rate per 100,000 residents climbed from 51 at the beginning of March to 110 at the end of March. But that's still far below the weekly case rate of 865 per 100,000 residents reported in the second week of January during the omicron variant surge.

Nesbitt said there were no immediate plans to reinstitute any of the lapsed virus protocols, but that always remained an option in the future.

"We need to remember that living with the virus does not mean forgetting about the virus. It's still out there, it's still causing people to get sick and some people to die," Michaud said. "If we're not prepared, we could be in a bad situation quickly again."

State Department: WH gift records for Trump, Pence missing

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The State Department says it is unable to compile a complete and accurate accounting of gifts presented to former President Donald Trump and other U.S. officials by foreign governments during Trump's final year in office, citing missing data from the White House.

In a report to be published in the Federal Register next week, the department says the Executive Office of the President did not submit information about gifts received by Trump and his family from foreign leaders in 2020. It also says the General Services Administration didn't submit information about gifts given to former Vice President Mike Pence and White House staffers that year.

The State Department said it sought the missing information from National Archives and Records Administration and the General Services Administration, but was told that "potentially relevant records" are not available because of access restrictions related to retired records.

The State Department's Office of Protocol reported the situation in footnotes to a partial list of gifts received by U.S. officials in 2020. The office publishes such lists annually in part to guard against potential conflicts of interest. A preview of the 2020 report was posted on the Federal Register website on Friday ahead of its formal publication on Monday.

The report notes that the lack of gift information could be related to internal oversights as the protocol office neglected to "submit the request for data to all reporting agencies prior to January 20, 2021," when the Trump administration ended and the Biden administration began. However, it also noted that there

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had been a "lack of adequate recordkeeping pertaining to diplomatic gifts" between Jan. 20, 2017, when Trump took office, and his departure from the White House four years later.

The State Department report comes as House lawmakers have opened an investigation into reports that Trump had taken boxes of classified materials with him to his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida after leaving office last year. The National Archives and Records Administration has asked the Justice Department to look into the matter.

The House panel investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol, meanwhile, has identified an almost 8-hour gap in official White House records of Trump's phone calls as the violence unfolded and his supporters stormed the building, according to two people familiar with the probe.

Regarding the 2020 gifts, the department said it had "made attempts to collect the required data from the current authoritative sources ... but it has confirmed that potentially relevant records are not available to the State Department's Office of the Chief of Protocol under applicable access rules for retired records of the Executive Office of the President and the Office of the Vice President."

"As a result, the data required to fully compile a complete listing for 2020 is unavailable," it said.

Gift records for Trump administration officials such as former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, former Defense Secretary Mark Esper and former Central Intelligence Agency chief Gina Haspel are included in the limited 2020 report, as are records for other senior diplomats, Pentagon and CIA officials.

Cheers for Jackson, who declares, 'We've made it, all of us'

By ZEKE MILLER and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Tearfully embracing a history-making moment, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson said Friday her confirmation as the first Black woman to the Supreme Court showed the progress of America, declaring, "We've made it — all of us."

Jackson delivered emotional remarks on the sunny White House South Lawn a day after the Senate approved her nomination, saying, it was a development the entire country could be proud of.

"We have come a long way toward perfecting our union," she said. "In my family, it took just one generation to go from segregation to the Supreme Court of the United States."

President Joe Biden, who made his own history by nominating her, stood by her side for Friday's event, celebrating her confirmation as "a moment of real change in American history." On Jackson's other side: Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black woman to attain her high office.

Jackson will take the bench later this year, filling the seat of retiring Justice Stephen Breyer on a court that was made up entirely of white men for almost two centuries, that declared her race unworthy of citizenship and endorsed American segregation.

"It has taken 232 years and 115 prior appointments for a Black woman to be selected to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States," Jackson said. "But we've made it. We've made it, all of us."

Jackson, at times speaking through tears as she thanked her family and mentors for their support, promised to follow in Breyer's footsteps on the bench.

"I have done my level best to stay in my lane and to reach a result that is consistent with my understanding of the law," she said, "And with the obligation to rule independently, without fear or favor."

Jackson's remarks on the White House lawn might be the most, and the last, the public hears from her for some time. She won't formally join the court until early summer, and the justices won't hear cases again until October. In any event, justices tend not to say much about themselves in their early years on the court, though some make sporadic public appearances and several have done speaking tours to pitch memoirs or their books about the law.

Jackson's arrival on the bench won't upend the current 6-3 conservative balance. But in addition to the racial history, it will for the first time put four women on the court at one time.

Biden nominated Jackson on the second anniversary of his pledge ahead of the South Carolina presidential primary to select a Black woman for the court. The move helped resurrect his flailing campaign and preserved his pathway to the White House, and Biden said the promise of putting someone like Jackson

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on the court helped motivate his bid for the Oval Office.

"I could see it as a day of hope, a day of promise, a day of progress, a day when once again the moral arc of the universe — as Barack (Obama) used to quote all the time — bends a little more toward justice," Biden told the boisterous crowd on the South Lawn. "I believe so strongly that we needed a court that looks like America."

Racial questions aside, a number of Republican senators aggressively questioned Jackson during confirmation hearings, accusing her of liberal activism as an appeals court judge and being soft on crime in some of her sentencing.

Biden praised Jackson's "incredible character and integrity" during the confirmation process, saying she put up with "verbal abuse, the anger, constant interruptions, the most vile baseless assertions and accusations." He praised the three Republican senators who joined Democrats to back her for the court: Maine Sen. Susan Collins, Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski and Utah Sen. Mitt Romney.

Jackson will be the high court's first former public defender — with the elite legal background of other justices as well. She has degrees from Harvard and Harvard Law School and held top clerkships, including for Breyer himself.

The crowd on the White House lawn included Jackson's family, members of Biden's Cabinet, some of the Democratic senators who backed her nomination, as well as Democratic representatives and allies. The White House said all current and former justices of the Supreme Court were invited, but none attended.

The event came amid a COVID-19 outbreak among Washington's political class that has sidelined members of Biden's administration and lawmakers, including Collins and Georgia Sen. Raphael Warnock, who tested positive for the virus just hours after voting for Brown's confirmation. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who was on the invite list, tested positive for the virus on Thursday.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki on Thursday addressed concerns that the White House event could be a "super-spreader" for the virus, like President Donald Trump's Rose Garden ceremony announcing the nomination of now-Justice Amy Coney Barrett. Psaki emphasized that the risks from the virus are now much lower because of vaccinations and treatments.

"At that point in time, vaccines were unavailable, people were not vaccinated, it certainly puts us in a different space," Psaki said.

While not all attendees were tested for the virus, Psaki said those close to Biden would be. Harris delivered remarks, though she was identified on Wednesday as a close contact of a staffer who tested positive. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines require close contacts to wear masks while around other people. Harris did not wear one during the South Lawn event, and she hugged Jackson at the conclusion.

"She had an emotional moment, which is understandable," said Psaki.

On Thursday, Jackson had joined Biden at the White House to watch the Senate vote unfold on TV, the two of them clasping hands in the Roosevelt Room as her confirmation became reality.

Throughout his 50 years in Washington, Biden has played an instrumental part in shaping the court, both inside and out of the Senate. But this was his first opportunity to make a selection of his own.

Biden may not get another chance. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, in an interview Thursday with Axios, refused to commit to hold confirmation hearings for a future Biden nominee to the high court if the GOP retakes control of the Senate in 2023.

While Jackson awaits Breyer's official retirement, a White House official said, she will remain on the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit but continue to recuse herself from cases.

Wisconsin governor vetoes Republican election bills

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Wisconsin's Democratic Gov. Tony Evers, who is up for reelection in November, on Friday vetoed a package of bills passed by the Republican-controlled Legislature that would have made a series of changes to the battleground state's election laws.

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Republicans who fast-tracked the bills don't have the votes to override his vetoes. The bills are part of a nationwide Republican effort to reshape elections following President Joe Biden's victory over Donald Trump.

The bills were quickly passed earlier this year amid Trump's insistence that the 2020 election was stolen from him and that there was widespread fraud, despite no evidence to back up his claims. Courts, recounts, independent audits and partisan reviews have all upheld President Joe Biden's nearly 21,000-vote victory.

In vetoing the eight bills, Evers told lawmakers that "The right to vote is fundamental to our democracy; it should not be subject to the whim of politicians who do not like the outcome of an election."

Evers said the vetoed bills were "passed under the guise of needing to reform our election system because elected officials in this state have enabled disinformation about our elections and elections process."

Republican Sen. Alberta Darling defended the measures, saying "It's clear the governor didn't even bother to read these bills and wants to lump any election reform as a conspiracy theory."

Republican supporters argued that the changes were intended to address deficiencies identified in an audit by the nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau and a review done by the conservative Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty. But the vetoed bills went far beyond those recommendations and would have changed how votes are cast and elections are run in Wisconsin.

Republican Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, who has rebuffed calls from Trump and some Republican lawmakers to decertify Biden's win, had said the bills were about fixing problems for future elections, not relitigating the past.

Vos, who met with Trump, ordered a taxpayer-funded investigation into the election that is ongoing led by former Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Michael Gableman. The investigation has been mired in lawsuits challenging the legality of subpoenas Gableman filed with mayors of the state's largest and most Democratic cities.

The court fight is expected to go into July and perhaps longer. Gableman's current contract runs through the end of April. Gableman, on a podcast hosted by former Trump Chief of Staff Steve Bannon, asked fans to call Vos to pressure him to change his mind about picking up Gableman's office equipment on April 26.

Vos floated the possibility of rescinding the subpoenas he signed for Gableman, a move that would effectively end the official investigation.

The bills Evers vetoed would have:

- Prohibited anyone other than the voter, an immediate family member or a legal guardian from returning an absentee ballot. That issue is currently pending before the Wisconsin Supreme Court, with oral arguments scheduled for next week.

- Barred the spending of private money on the administration of elections. Republicans have cried foul over \$8.8 million in grants Wisconsin's largest and most Democratic cities received in 2020 from the Center for Tech and Civic Life, a group funded by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. Grants were also awarded to smaller, majority Republican cities.

Republicans are trying to get around the veto by putting the ban in the state constitution. That would require approval by voters as early as next year.

- Bar election clerks from filling in any missing information on a voter's absentee ballot envelope. Trump had argued that thousands of ballots where clerks filled in missing information on the outside envelope should be discounted, but courts rejected his argument. The bipartisan Wisconsin Elections Commission had advised clerks for years that filling in the missing information was OK.

- Require the bipartisan elections commission to hire Republican and Democratic-aligned attorneys to work with commission members and offer what would likely be contrary legal advice. Nonpartisan attorneys currently work for the commission.

- Give the Legislature control over guidance delivered to local election clerks by the bipartisan Wisconsin Elections Commission.

- Limit who can identify as indefinitely confined, a status that allows for absentee ballots for those who can't get to the polls due to age, illness or disability.

- Require the state to conduct checks to ensure that registered voters are United States citizens.

Alaska man gets 32 months for threatening to kill senators

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — A rural Alaska man who threatened to assassinate both of Alaska's U.S. senators in a series of profane messages left at their congressional offices was sentenced Friday to 32 months in prison.

Jay Allen Johnson was also fined \$5,000, ordered to serve three years of supervised release after his prison sentence, and is barred by a protective order from contacting U.S. Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, their family and staff members for three years.

"Nothing excuses this conduct, threatening our elected officials, an act that attacks our very system of governance," U.S. Attorney John E. Kuhn Jr. of the District of Alaska said in a statement. "The erosion of civility in our political discourse will never justify threats or acts of violence. Johnson's actions must be punished, and the Department of Justice will always work to ensure our elected officials can serve without fear of harm."

Johnson, who said he was too old and ill to carry out his threats, partially blamed his behavior on a mixture of pain medications and alcohol along with the isolation during the pandemic prevalent during the five-month span of 2021 when he left 17 threatening voicemails.

Johnson, 65, of Delta Junction, pleaded guilty in January to two counts of threatening to kill a U.S. official in January. Sentencing was carried out at U.S. District Court in Fairbanks.

The government sought a sentence of 37 months in prison, followed by three years of supervised release along with the protective order.

Johnson sought a 30-month term or supervised release.

"The defendant's conduct is simply unacceptable in a democracy" U.S. Assistant Attorney Ryan Tansey wrote in the government's sentencing memo filed before the sentencing hearing. "As political violence and domestic extremism grow, violent intimidation of public officials must result in serious criminal consequences."

In one message left at Murkowski's office, Johnson asked, ".50 caliber shell ... you ever see what that does to a human head? Yeah, well..."

In another message to Murkowski, he said: "I will find out all your properties, and I will burn everything you hope to have, and I will burn everything you hope to own."

Johnson also blamed her for the undocumented workers who have come into the country.

"Your life is worth \$5,000, that's all it's worth," he said on message to Murkowski's office. "And as you let in these terrorists, and assassins, guess what, I'm going to use them. ... I'm going to use them to come and assassinate your f—— a—."

In a message left for Sullivan, Johnson said he was tired of politicians destroying the country. He claimed he would get out his .50 caliber and start a GoFundMe page for the shells. "And I'm coming with a vengeance, motherf——," he said.

"Sadly, political violence of all stripes has become a clear and present danger to public safety and the functioning of our democracy," the government memo states. "The defendant's conduct showed his rejection of that democracy and his willingness to resort to repeated violent threats when duly elected representatives take actions with which he disagrees."

Johnson, who has had six driving under the influence convictions, is not allowed to possess firearms because he is a felon. However, law enforcement seized seven unsecured firearms at his home when executing a search warrant.

The defense said the weapons belonged to Johnson's wife, Catherine Pousson-Johnson. In October, when pleading that her husband be released from jail while the legal case proceeded, she was asked if she was aware if her husband was making threats against the two senators.

"Who hasn't?" she replied.

At the same hearing, she said, "My husband is an old man, and he gets very angry listening to politics on the news."

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In the defense's sentencing memo, attorney Jason Weiner describes Johnson as being in poor health, suffering from osteoarthritis and other ailments. He has had a series of surgeries over the years, including twice on knees, back and shoulder procedures. He has been prescribed pain medications.

He has also been diagnosed with anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, the latter due to a turbulent childhood. Because of his health problems, he retired from working physical labor jobs at age 55, when his drinking began, the memo says.

He takes full responsibility for his conduct and realizes that while he never intended to carry out the verbal threats, the senators did not know that, the memo says.

"Between the prescribed narcotics, pain and self-medicating, Mr. Johnson was not himself," the memo says.

"If anything, Mr. Johnson could use supervision not continued incarceration," the defense memo says when asking the judge to consider three years of supervised release as an option instead of further incarceration.

Muscogee return South nearly 200 years after forced removal

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

OXFORD, Ala. (AP) — Native Americans whose ancestors were forced out of the Southeast almost 200 years ago during a purge that cleared the way for white settlers returned Friday for a two-day festival with a name that sums up its purpose: "We have come back."

A busload of Muscogee (Creek) Nation citizens and others in vans and cars traveled from their homes in Oklahoma and elsewhere for a celebration in the east Alabama city of Oxford, located on what once was part of Arbeka, a Muscogee community dating back 12,000 years. The people who lived there were forced to move west in 1836 during the "Trail of Tears," a brutal journey of about 700 miles (1,125 kilometers) during which many died.

Land that once was a village inhabited by an estimated 3,000 people is now the site of a city park with sports fields and a walking trail, said Raelynn Butler, who manages the nation's historical and preservation department. Tribal citizens gathered there at the start of a two-day event to tell Muscogee stories, sing hymns, explain tribal history and give area residents a chance to meet their leaders.

"We're trying to reestablish our presence in our homeland," Butler said.

The Muscogee name for the event is "Reyicepes," or "We have come back." With the United States currently considering how to best interpret a history that includes the enslavement of Black people and the mistreatment of other minorities, women and Native Americans, the tribe is hoping to tell its own story, Principal Chief David Hill said.

"If you read the history books now it doesn't really tell you why and how we were removed with the Trail of Tears," he said. "We didn't want to leave. We were forced to leave."

Once among the largest groups in the Southeast, the Muscogee territory included parts of the present-day states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia and South Carolina. The tribe's last major fighting force was defeated by U.S. troops at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend about 55 miles (88 kilometers) south of Oxford in 1814, leading to its eventual expulsion from the region.

About 23,000 Muscogee were forced out of the Southeast in all, Butler said, and as many as 4,000 died on a journey that included long stretches of walking and rides on barges and riverboats. The deaths continued once people arrived in Oklahoma because so many were seriously ill after the trip.

With about 96,000 enrolled citizens and headquarters in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, the tribe is now one of the largest in the United States. Groups of Muscogee have made trips to the Southeast to reconnect with the region in recent years, including visits to the Horseshoe Bend battlefield, now a historic site, and Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park in Macon, Georgia, Butler said.

The weekend festival is different, she said, because tribal leaders developed the idea on their own and the city welcomed the plan. A partnership between the two got started years ago when municipal officials began developing the park on the old village site, discovered artifacts and notified Muscogee leaders, she said.

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While a group from the Muscogee Nation visited the park in 2016 after it opened, most citizens haven't. "This is the first time many people coming have been here," Butler said. "We know these places but we've never seen them with our own eyes."

The nation wants to do more to connect with the local community and Muscogee still living in the South, the principal chief said. The nation already is working on educational programs with area schools, Hill said, and there have been discussions about using city-owned land at the park, which includes a reconstructed mound and interpretative signs, for a cultural center.

"We look at it as, 'If they can't come to us, we'll go to them,'" he said.

EXPLAINER: BA.2 variant takes over. What's known about it?

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

In the latest battle of the coronavirus mutants, an extra-contagious version of omicron has taken over the world.

The coronavirus version known as BA.2 is now dominant in at least 68 countries, including the United States.

The World Health Organization says it makes up about 94% of sequenced omicron cases submitted to an international coronavirus database in the most recent week. And the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says it was responsible for 72% of new U.S. infections last week.

Dr. Wesley Long, a pathologist at Houston Methodist in Texas, said he's seen BA.2 quickly become dominant in his medical system. At the end of last week, the variant was responsible for more than three-quarters of cases in Houston Methodist hospitals. Less than two weeks earlier, 1% to 3% of cases were caused by BA.2.

"It's not terribly surprising because it is more contagious" than the original omicron, Long said.

As the variant advances, scientists are learning more about it. But they still don't know exactly how it will affect the trajectory of the pandemic.

WHAT'S KNOWN

BA.2 has lots of mutations. It's been dubbed "stealth omicron" because it lacks a genetic quirk of the original omicron that allowed health officials to rapidly differentiate it from the delta variant using a certain PCR test.

One reason BA.2 has gained ground, scientists say, is that it's about 30% more contagious than the original omicron. In rare cases, research shows it can sicken people even if they've already had an omicron infection — although it doesn't seem to cause more severe disease.

Vaccines appear equally effective against both types of omicron. For both, vaccination plus a booster offers strong protection against severe illness and death.

HAS THE VARIANT PUSHED UP CASES?

Coronavirus cases rose in parts of Europe and Asia when BA.2 became dominant, and some scientists are concerned that the variant could also push up cases across the U.S.

Besides being more contagious, it's spreading at a time when governments are relaxing restrictions designed to control COVID-19. Also, people are taking off their masks and getting back to activities such as traveling, eating indoors at restaurants and attending crowded events.

At this point, overall coronavirus cases in the U.S. are still on the decline. But there have been upticks in some places, including New York, Arizona and Illinois. Health officials have also noted that case counts are getting more unreliable because of the wide availability of home tests and the fact some people are no longer getting tested.

"We're entering a phase where increasing cases or waves may be very regional and it may depend a lot on vaccination levels in the community — and not just vaccination levels but timing of the vaccinations," Long said. "How long ago were they? Did people get boosters? Because we know the immunity to the vaccine wanes a little bit over time."

Long said he feels "very certain" that cases will eventually go back up in the U.S., whether that's because of BA.2 or some future variant. "If it's BA.2," he said, "it may be more of a wave or a speed bump

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than a surge.”

For now, COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths are still trending down nationally.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER VARIANTS TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT?

As the coronavirus continues to evolve, the WHO is tracking other mutants, including hybrids known as “recombinants.”

These include combinations of delta and omicron and hybrids of BA.2 and the original omicron, also known as BA.1.

One recombinant that health authorities are tracking closely is a BA.1-BA.2 hybrid called XE, which was first detected in the United Kingdom in January. About 600 cases have been reported, and scientists believe it may be about 10% more contagious than BA.2.

WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE DO?

The advice from experts remains the same: Take precautions to avoid getting COVID-19.

“The virus is still out there circulating,” Long said. “Vaccination is still your best defense.”

Get the shots if you haven’t already, he said, and get the second booster if you’re eligible because you are 50 or older or have a compromised immune system.

“If cases start going up in your community, think about assessing your risk level,” Long said. “If you stopped masking and stopped worrying about distancing and things ... that’s the time to reinstitute those protective measures.”

Macron confident as far-right rival closes in ahead of vote

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — President Emmanuel Macron said Friday he has no fear of losing France’s presidential election, despite far-right rival Marine Le Pen narrowing the gap in opinion polls days before the first-round vote.

Still, suspense is the watchword in Sunday’s voting to choose the top two among a dozen contenders, with a predicted low turnout that could help decide the race.

“I have the spirit of conquest rather than the spirit of defeat,” Macron, a centrist, said in an interview with RTL radio on the final day of campaigning. But he cautiously added, “Nothing is ever a given.”

Le Pen, running in her third presidential race, has consistently placed second behind Macron in polls. She appeared to close the gap even further according to latest polls, which have given a difference of between 1 and 6 points between the two.

If the polls mirror election results, Macron and Le Pen would repeat the 2017 scenario, squaring off in a second round Apr. 24. Macron won by a landslide five years ago, taking 66% of the vote to Le Pen’s 34%.

This time, polls forecast the score to be much closer.

Le Pen has expended much energy to take the edge off her National Rally party in order to make it more appealing to voters. She has softened her image even more and made purchasing power the centerpiece of her campaign, but hasn’t give up on her key themes: stopping the “migratory submersion” and “eradicating” political Islam.

“If Emmanuel Macron had enriched the country, excuse me but we wouldn’t be talking about purchasing power,” Le Pen said at her final rally Thursday evening in the southwest town of Perpignan whose far-right mayor, Louis Aliot, is her former companion.

Macron denounced the far-right as “playing with the fears” of people, in an interview with French online media Brut on Friday evening. “When I look at far-right views, whoever the candidate is ... there are lots of links to conspiracy theories, and for two years of (COVID-19) pandemic, everything and its opposite was said, quite worryingly,” he said.

“And then, there are short-term proposals, sometimes not making financial sense at all or demagogic, like on purchasing power,” he added.

Macron stressed the unemployment rate decreased from about 10% to 7.4% during his term and vowed, if reelected, to reach “full employment.”

Macron chose the online media to do his last interview before Sunday’s vote in efforts to reach out to

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young voters, who tend to be less likely to go to the polls than the rest of the population.

Macron spoke to several French television and radio channels and newspapers this week in an final push to promote his policies. He cited his presidential duties, notably his diplomatic efforts over the war in Ukraine, to justify his absence during much of the campaign, which has been criticized by other candidates.

Turnout could be the deciding factor in the the election and could harm Le Pen's chances most because her working class support base is composed of voters who tend to stay at home on election day.

Pollsters say measuring the proportion of people who may not vote is a delicate task. The Odoxa polling firm suggested Friday that abstention could near a historic low level, with 27.4% of eligible voters staying home. That would be five points more than in 2017.

The record was in 2002 when 28.4% of voters failed to go to the polls in the first round, when then-President Jacques Chirac was competing with Le Pen's firebrand far-right father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, among others. Le Pen was defeated in the final round in a landslide.

"It could even be higher than this record," Erwan Lestrohan, director of studies at Odoxa, said in an interview Friday with The Associated Press. "This is the final stretch and there are still some undecided voters, but we are very close to a record abstention."

In addition, three out of 10 people who say they are sure they will vote could change their minds or remain undecided about which candidate to choose, Lestrohan said.

"There is still lots of suspense in the final stretch," he said.

In Perpignan, Le Pen sought to rally supporters including those mulling about casting their ballot for novice far-right candidate Eric Zemmour, a former TV pundit whose bid for the presidency is based entirely on the migration issue. He stands in fourth place in the polls, behind far-left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Le Pen also appealed to supporters to cast their ballots.

"To those who stopped voting because of anger, disgust, disillusion, fatigue, I tell them: 'I understand you' but here, become citizen again," Le Pen said.

SpaceX launches 3 visitors to space station for \$55M each

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — SpaceX launched three rich businessmen and their astronaut escort to the International Space Station on Friday for more than a week's stay, as NASA joins Russia in hosting guests at the world's most expensive tourist destination.

It's SpaceX's first private charter flight to the orbiting lab after two years of carrying astronauts there for NASA.

Arriving at the space station Saturday are an American, a Canadian and an Israeli who run investment, real estate and other companies. They're paying \$55 million apiece for the rocket ride and accommodations, all meals included.

Russia has been hosting tourists at the space station — and before that the Mir station — for decades. Just last fall, a Russian movie crew flew up, followed by a Japanese fashion tycoon and his assistant.

NASA is finally getting into the act, after years of opposing space station visitors.

"It was a hell of a ride and we're looking forward to the next 10 days," said former NASA astronaut and chaperone Michael Lopez-Alegria on reaching orbit.

The visitors' tickets include access to all but the Russian portion of the space station — they'll need permission from the three cosmonauts on board. Three Americans and a German also live up there.

Lopez-Alegria plans to avoid talking about politics and the war in Ukraine while he's at the space station.

"I honestly think that it won't be awkward. I mean maybe a tiny bit," he said. He expects the "spirit of collaboration will shine through."

The private Axiom Space company arranged the visit with NASA for its three paying customers: Larry Connor of Dayton, Ohio, who runs the Connor Group; Mark Pathy, founder and CEO of Montreal's Mavrik Corp.; and Israel's Eytan Stibbe, a former fighter pilot and founding partner of Vital Capital.

Before the flight, their enthusiasm was obvious. Stibbe did a little dance when he arrived at the launch

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pad at Kennedy Space Center.

SpaceX and NASA have been upfront with them about the risks of spaceflight, said Lopez-Alegria, who spent seven months at the space station 15 years ago.

"There's no fuzz, I think, on what the dangers are or what the bad days could look like," Lopez-Alegria told The Associated Press before the flight.

NASA's Kathy Lueders, head of space operations, said there's a lot to learn from this first wholly private station visit. "But man, was this launch a great start," she told reporters.

Each visitor has a full slate of experiments to conduct during their stay, one reason they don't like to be called space tourists.

"They're not up there to paste their nose on the window," said Axiom's co-founder and president, Michael Suffredini, a former NASA space station program manager.

The three businessmen are the latest to take advantage of the opening of space to those with deep pockets. Jeff Bezos' rocket company Blue Origin is taking customers on 10-minute rides to the edge of space, while Virgin Galactic expects to start flying customers on its rocket ship later this year.

Friday's flight is the second private charter for Elon Musk's SpaceX, which took a billionaire and his guests on a three-day orbit ride last year. SpaceX's fifth flight of NASA astronauts to the station is coming up in just a couple weeks.

Axiom is targeting next year for its second private flight to the space station. More customer trips will follow, with Axiom adding its own rooms to the orbiting complex beginning in 2024. After about five years, the company plans to detach its compartments to form a self-sustaining station — one of several commercial outposts intended to replace the space station once it's retired and NASA shifts to the moon.

At an adjacent pad during Friday's launch: NASA's new moon rocket, which is awaiting completion of a dress rehearsal for a summertime test flight.

As a gift for their seven station hosts, the four visitors are taking up paella and other Spanish cuisine prepared by celebrity chef José Andrés. The rest of their time at the station, NASA's freeze-dried chow will have to do.

The automated SpaceX capsule and its four passengers are due back April 19 with a splashdown off the Florida coast.

Connor is honoring Ohio's air and space legacy, is bringing along a fabric swatch from the Wright brothers' 1903 Kitty Hawk flyer and gold foil from the Apollo 11 command module from the Neil Armstrong Air and Space Museum in Wapakoneta.

Only the second Israeli in space, Stibbe will continue a thunderstorm experiment begun by the first — Ilan Ramon, who died aboard shuttle Columbia in 2003. They were in the same fighter pilot squadron.

Stibbe is carrying copies of recovered pages of Ramon's space diary, as well as a song composed by Ramon's musician son and a painting of pages falling from the sky by his daughter.

"To be a part of this unique crew is a proof for me that there's no dream beyond reach," he said.

Ex-Goldman Sachs banker convicted in plot to loot 1MDB fund

By TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A former Goldman Sachs banker was convicted Friday of bribery and other corruption charges accusing him of participating in a \$4.5 billion scheme to ransack the Malaysian state investment fund known as 1MDB.

A jury reached the verdict at the U.S. trial of Roger Ng in federal court in Brooklyn. Jurors had heard nearly two months of evidence about tens of millions of dollars in bribes and kickbacks allegedly orchestrated by Malaysian financier and fugitive socialite Low Taek Jho, better known as Jho Low.

Defense attorney Marc Agnifilo told reporters outside court that he was surprised by the verdict because "the evidence wasn't reliable," and that he was considering an appeal. He also said the defense team was more disappointed than his client.

Ng "is doing better than his lawyers," Agnifilo said. "He has great fortitude."

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The embezzlement bankrolled lavish spending on jewels, art, a superyacht and luxury real estate. The spoils even helped finance wild parties and Hollywood movies, including the 2013 Martin Scorsese film "The Wolf of Wall Street" that starred Leonardo DiCaprio.

"With today's verdict, a powerful message has been delivered to those who commit financial crimes motivated by greed," U.S. Attorney Breon Peace said in a statement.

Ng faces up to 30 years in prison. No sentencing date was set.

A former head of investment banking in Malaysia, Ng is the only Goldman banker to stand trial in the 1MDB scandal. The 49-year-old had pleaded not guilty to three counts — conspiring to launder money and violating two anti-bribery laws.

Prosecutors alleged that Ng and other Goldman Sachs bankers helped 1MDB raise \$6.5 billion through bond sales — only to divert \$4.5 billion of it to themselves and their co-conspirators through bribes and kickbacks.

"The harm to the people of Malaysia is immeasurable," prosecutor Alixandra Smith said during closing arguments. "It is deeply unfair to everyone else who plays by the rules."

Ng's defense attorneys have described the looting of 1MDB state investment fund as "perhaps the single largest heist in the history of the world." But they contend U.S. prosecutors scapegoated Ng for crimes committed by others, including the government's star witness, Tim Leissner.

"Roger is basically the fall guy for this whole thing," Agnifilo said in his closing argument. "And Tim Leissner is looking to close the biggest deal of his life."

Agnifilo accused Leissner, a higher-ranking Goldman banker, of falsely implicating Ng in a bid for leniency in his own criminal case.

Leissner "never stopped lying ever, and he didn't stop lying in this courtroom," Agnifilo said.

During several days on the witness stand, Leissner testified that he, Ng and Low used offshore accounts and shell companies to "disguise the flow of funds." The money laundering efforts also involved drawing up fake contracts with banks, he said.

"If we told any bank the truth, it wouldn't work," he said. "The house of cards would have fallen down."

He also described a dinner in London around 2012 where Low informed he and Ng they would be receiving kickbacks. Leissner said he knew that would be illegal, but didn't care because if the deal went through he would be "a hero" at Goldman Sachs.

Ng, he added, was "particularly glad he was going to be paid some money" because he felt the firm had undercompensated him over the years.

The defense claimed that some of the \$35 million Ng received through Leissner — money prosecutors said were illicit proceeds from the scheme — was actually the proceeds of a legitimate business transaction between the two men's wives.

On cross-examination, Ng's attorney sought to attack Leissner's credibility by peppering him with questions about his history of lying about his marital status. He admitted he forged documents in 2014 to dupe his now-estranged wife, Kimora Lee Simmons, into believing he was divorced so she would agree to marry him. Simmons is a model, reality TV personality and ex-wife of rap mogul Russell Simmons.

Leissner, 52, pleaded guilty in 2018 to paying millions of dollars in bribes to government officials in Malaysia and Abu Dhabi. He was ordered to forfeit \$43.7 million as part of his guilty plea and agreed to testify against Ng.

Low, who maintains his innocence, became well known in the New York City and Los Angeles club scenes. In 2012, he threw an opulent 31st birthday bash attended by DiCaprio, Kim Kardashian and other celebrities — a fete described by The Wall Street Journal as the "wildest party (Las) Vegas ever saw."

The looting of the state investment fund led to the fall of Prime Minister Najib Razak's government in 2018. Najib was later convicted by a Malaysian court of abuse of power and other crimes related to the scandal and sentenced to 12 years in prison.

Law reduced prison time for man tied to Sacramento shooting

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By DON THOMPSON Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A suspect arrested in connection with last weekend's mass shooting outside bars in Sacramento served less than half his 10-year sentence because of voter-approved changes to state law that lessened the punishment for his felony convictions and provided a chance for earlier release.

Smiley Allen Martin was freed in February after serving time for punching a girlfriend, dragging her from her home by her hair and whipping her with a belt, according to court and prison records.

Those count as nonviolent offenses under California law, which considers only about two dozen crimes to be violent felonies — such as murder, rape, arson and kidnapping.

Martin, 27, was arrested Tuesday on suspicion of possession of a firearm by a prohibited person and possession of a machine gun. He is among the 12 people wounded during Sunday's shooting, which killed six others.

Police have said the violence was a shootout between rival gangs in which at least five people fired weapons, including Martin's brother, Dandrae Martin, who also was arrested. No one has yet been charged with homicide in the shooting.

Smiley Martin typically would have remained behind bars until at least May after serving a minimum of half his time for his previous arrest in 2017, but prison officials evidently used a very expansive approach to applying lockup time credits to his sentence, said Gregory Totten, chief executive officer of the California District Attorneys Association and a former Ventura County district attorney.

"They've been given very broad authority to early release folks and to give them additional credit and all kinds of considerations for purposes of reducing the length of sentence that somebody serves," Totten said.

Corrections officials did not dispute that Martin was among thousands of inmates who received additional credits that sped up their releases under state law. But the officials said their policy prohibits disclosing what prison time credits Martin received.

They cited credits through Proposition 57, the 2016 ballot measure that aimed to give most of the state's felons a chance of earlier release. Credits were also broadly authorized in California to lower the prison population during the pandemic.

Proposition 57 credits include good behavior while behind bars, though corrections officials declined to release Martin's disciplinary report. Good conduct credit is supposed to be reserved for inmates who follow all the rules and complete their assigned duties.

The state "has implemented various credit-earning opportunities to incentivize good behavior and program participation for incarcerated individuals, including those created in furtherance of Proposition 57— which was overwhelmingly approved by voters," state corrections spokesperson Vicky Waters said in a statement.

Supporters of the credits, including former Gov. Jerry Brown, who pushed for Proposition 57, have said it's important to give inmates a second chance. The opportunity for earlier release encourages inmates to participate in education and other rehabilitative programs and helps to reduce mass incarceration.

"The most recent reforms in California are seeking to change a culture that has been churning out recidivism problems for generations," said Will Matthews, spokesperson for the Californians for Safety and Justice group, which backed the changes. "The question we need to be asking ourselves is, how are we engaging in behavior change?"

Under Proposition 57, credits are granted for completing rehabilitative or educational programs, self-help and volunteer public service activities, earning a high school diploma or higher education degree and performing a heroic act. Officials added credits during the coronavirus pandemic, including 12 weeks of credit that applied to most inmates.

Martin was denied parole in May 2021 under California's process for nonviolent offenders to get earlier parole, after a letter was sent from the Sacramento County District Attorney's Office. Prosecutors said they objected to his parole based on his lengthy criminal record and asserted that Martin "clearly has little regard for human life and the law."

Six months after he turned 18, Martin was caught in January 2013 with an assault rifle and two fully loaded 25-bullet magazines, prosecutors said. Months later, he pushed aside a Walmart clerk to steal computers worth \$2,800, they said. In 2016, he was arrested as a parolee at large. And less than six months after

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that was the assault that sent him back to prison.

It's not clear if Martin has an attorney who can comment on his behalf.

Martin pleaded no contest and was sent to prison on charges of corporal injury and assault likely to cause great bodily injury in January 2018 under a plea deal in which prosecutors dismissed charges of kidnapping — considered a violent felony — and intimidating a witness or victim.

The sentencing judge awarded Martin 508 days of credits for time he spent in Sacramento County jail before his conviction, based on a California law that allows judges to double the actual time in jail, which in Martin's case was 254 days.

Martin also had "a variety of additional post-sentencing credits," which corrections department spokesperson Dana Simas said were awarded for time served while awaiting transfer to state prison from county jail.

Before Proposition 57, he would have qualified for 20% "good time" credits — meaning he could reduce his time served by one-fifth — but corrections officials used their authority under the ballot measure to bump those to 50%. Pending regulations opposed by most of the state's district attorneys would further increase good time credits to two-thirds of a sentence for such repeat offenders.

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg, a progressive Democrat who formerly led the state Senate, was among those upset when he learned of Martin's record.

"If people have a history of committing violent acts, and they have not shown a propensity or willingness to change, I don't think they should be out on the streets," he said at an event where officials requested more than \$3 billion from the state to expand crime prevention programs.

Republican state Sen. Jim Nielsen, who once headed the state parole board, said "good time" credits are generally awarded automatically, without inmates having to do anything to earn them.

"It gives them enormous opportunity to free up beds," said Nielsen, an opponent of earlier releases.

The state has relied on such efforts, particularly its powers under Proposition 57, to keep the prison population below the level required by a panel of federal judges who ruled that inmate crowding had led to unconstitutionally poor conditions.

Martin was released to the supervision of the Sacramento County Probation Department in February. County probation officials wouldn't provide the terms, saying their records are not public documents.

Without discussing Martin's case, Karen Pank, executive director of the Chief Probation Officers of California association, said generally someone coming out of prison under the state's Post Release Community Supervision program with an extensive and violent criminal history would likely have been treated on a "high-risk" caseload.

That would subject the person to more intensive supervision, including a requirement to check in with a probation officer more frequently and in person, although individualized determinations on risks and needs would be made and treatment and services would continue to be offered.

Hours before Sunday's shootout, Martin posted a live Facebook video of himself brandishing a handgun, a law enforcement official told The Associated Press. The official was not authorized to public discuss details of the shooting investigation and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Pank said if there is evidence of a felon in possession of a firearm, that can be grounds for a violation, which may result in time in jail. However, it's unlikely anyone from law enforcement could have acted in time even if they had seen the video.

"The big if is would they have known about it," said Totten. But in this case, "it didn't matter — it was so close to the time" of the shooting.

Experts set to travel to Ukraine to identify the war's dead

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — An international organization formed to identify the dead and missing from the 1990s Balkan conflicts is preparing to send a team of forensics experts to Ukraine as the death toll mounts more than six weeks into the war caused by Russia's invasion.

Authorities in Kyiv have reached out to the International Commission on Missing Persons to help put

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names to bodies that might otherwise remain anonymous amid the fog of war.

A team made up of a forensic pathologist, forensic archeologist and an expert on collecting DNA samples from bodies and from families to cross-match, is expected to travel to Ukraine early next week, Director-General Kathryn Bomberger told The Associated Press on Friday.

They will help identify the dead, but also document how they died — information that can feed into war crimes investigations in the future. The organization's laboratory in an office block on a busy street in The Hague will build a central database cataloging evidence and the identities of the missing.

"Having this centralized capability is absolutely critical because you have to look at this as an investigation into a gigantic crime scene that is taking place across Ukraine," Bomberger said.

The team will have plenty of work to do when it deploys to Bucha, where images of bodies lying in the streets after Russian forces withdrew shocked the world.

Bucha Mayor Anatoliy Fedoruk said Thursday on Ukrainian television that at least three sites of mass shootings of civilians during the Russian occupation have been found. Fedoruk said hundreds have been killed and investigators are finding bodies in yards, parks and city squares.

Vladyslav Atroshenko, the mayor of Chernihiv, said about 700 military personnel and civilians have been killed in the northern city during the war, and that 70 of the bodies remain unidentified, Ukrainian state news agency Ukrinform reported.

The commission, known by its acronym ICMP, already has a working relationship with the prosecution office of the International Criminal Court and other crime-fighting agencies like Interpol and Europol to share evidence. ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan already has opened an investigation in Ukraine.

"We want to make sure that we work together with the Ukrainian authorities to properly excavate these crime scene sites to identify the mortal remains so that evidence can be provided in the future for criminal trial purposes, not only potentially to the ICC, but also potentially within domestic courts in Ukraine," Bomberger said.

The organization is at the forefront of using new technology in their painstaking work to identify bodies from even the smallest samples.

"We have implemented a new extraction technique, which allows us to extract more DNA from smaller or more damaged fragments of bone sample," said DNA Laboratory manager Kieren Hill. "This is quite a unique method in terms of its application into the missing person's context."

On Friday, lab staff in white clothes covered with blue plastic overalls, hair nets and gloves were meticulously working on other cases, grasping small shards of bone in pliers and grinding away their surfaces in search of DNA.

The ICMP has an online portal where people in Ukraine can anonymously report locations of bodies, and will help family members of the missing to provide DNA samples to help identify them.

The commission was established to trace the dead from the Balkan wars of the 1990s. Its sterile, high-tech laboratories are a world away from the muddy mass graves where the organization's experts first rose to prominence among the decomposing dead of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre of more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys.

They helped put names to bodies that in some cases were torn apart and spread across multiple mass graves as Bosnian Serb forces buried and then re-buried the dead in an effort to cover traces of their genocidal attempt to wipe out Srebrenica's Bosniaks.

The commission made sure they failed to cover their tracks. Bosnian Serb military chief Gen. Ratko Mladic and his political master, Radovan Karadzic, are now serving life sentences for crimes including genocide. Both men were convicted in part thanks to evidence gathered by the ICMP.

Funded by voluntary contributions from governments, the organization has since helped national governments put names to thousands more people whose anonymous remains were recovered from sites including over 3,000 mass and clandestine graves.

It has worked at crime scenes and disaster sites around the world, including Syria, Libya and Iraq. The organization also helped to identify victims swept away by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and extracted DNA from bone samples of 250 people killed when Hurricane Katrina slammed into Louisiana in 2005.

Ukraine could prove to be one of its biggest challenges yet, as the organization works together with Ukrainian authorities to investigate and build cases amid an ongoing war.

"So ensuring that this process moves in accordance with proper investigations, that these sites are properly documented, the proper chain of custody is obtained, will be a challenge," Bomberger said. "I think under the circumstances while there's an active conflict."

Doctors, crater disprove Russia's hospital airstrike misinfo

By LORI HINNANT and MSTYSLAV CHERNOV Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — A woman on the verge of giving birth with her leg flayed open by shrapnel. A shockwave that shattered the glass and ceramic lining of a room with medical waste. A nurse who suffered a concussion.

This is what the Ukrainian doctors remember of the Russian airstrike that destroyed the Mariupol maternity hospital where they once worked. And these memories are now all they have from a day they wish they could forget: Russian soldiers purged the evidence from their phones when they fled Mariupol.

"With just one blow, there was simply nothing, no children's clinic, it was simply blown away," said Dr. Lyudmila Mykhailenko, the acting director at Hospital No. 3 in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol. The sprawling courtyard of the hospital complex was — and remains — "one continuous shell crater."

Three doctors and a paramedic spoke with The Associated Press to offer new details from a March 9 airstrike that happened when communications were all but severed, and to counter fresh Russian misinformation. They left the city separately in private cars, as have thousands from Mariupol in recent weeks, and are now scattered in other towns around Ukraine and in Poland.

Their testimony, along with AP reporting, AP footage from the scene and interviews with munitions experts who analyzed the size of the shell crater, directly contradicts Russian claims that there was no airstrike. Russian officials have repeatedly tried to sow doubt about atrocities in Mariupol, the shattered city in eastern Ukraine that is a key Russian military objective. In particular, Russia has made great efforts to falsely blame the death and destruction in the city on Ukrainian shelling.

Two of the three doctors, like most who passed through Russian checkpoints on the way out of Mariupol, said their cell phones were searched and videos and photos of the city were deleted. People with what was considered suspect imagery or who lacked documents were separated out, but it's not clear what ultimately happened to them.

"I had lists on my phone, I had photos, I had everything, but we were strongly told to delete all of this," said Mykhailenko, who spoke for two hours with hardly any interruptions with a fierce determination to describe the attack and her narrow escape. "The trash bin was deleted. ... We had dashcam footage of everything that was going on in the city, but they made us delete that as well."

Most recently, a Russian government-linked Twitter account shared an interview last week with Mariana Vishegirska, one of the women in the maternity hospital. Vishegirska, wearing polka dot pajamas and looking dazed, emerged almost unscathed from the hospital airstrike.

In the latest interview, the new mother said the hospital was not hit by an airstrike last month. She described the explosions as a pair of shells that struck nearby, saying she heard no airplanes. She left vague who could be responsible.

She said fellow survivors from the basement agreed when they discussed it in the moments afterward.

"They did not hear it either. They said that it was a shell that flew in from somewhere else. That is, it did not come from the sky," she said in the interview.

Vishegirska is now in Russia-controlled territory, but it's not clear exactly where or under what conditions the interview was filmed.

However, a team of Associated Press journalists working on the ground in Mariupol nearby documented the sound of the plane, then the twin explosions. One of the explosions blasted a crater more than two stories deep in the courtyard — consistent with an airstrike using a 500-kilogram bomb and considerably stronger than artillery crossfire, according to two munitions experts consulted by The Associated Press.

Joseph Bermudez, an imagery analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the

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size of the hole and the visible effects of impact on the surrounding buildings leave no doubt it was an airstrike.

The attack on the Mariupol hospital was one of at least 37 Russian strikes on medical facilities across Ukraine recorded by The Associated Press. Over the course of the war, every hospital in the city has been struck at least once by shells or airstrikes — the first was just four days after fighting began. Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boichenko said Wednesday that 50 people had burned to death in Russian strikes on hospitals in the city.

Before the attack, it was a relatively quiet day at the Mariupol hospital.

Dr. Yana Frantsusova was sorting medical waste in a room in another building at the hospital compound when the tiles and glass around her shattered. It was about 2:45 p.m. She started to run, but the shockwave slammed the door shut in her face.

"I ran out with difficulty, and all of us, all people from my department, all the nurses, doctors who were there, everyone was already on the floor," she said. "Then another explosion occurred."

Frantsusova had survived an airstrike once already, on a house near hers, and this felt the same — an intense shockwave followed by utter destruction. She and her team of medics got up from the floor to take in the injured and those able to walk.

Among the pregnant women in the gravest danger, "one was already giving birth, at the moment when she was brought to us," she said. Another had an open wound to her thigh. A third was in a state of shellshock, with shrapnel gashes in both legs.

The AP journalists filmed two large plumes of smoke in the distance in the direction of the airstrike. It then took them about 25 minutes to arrive at the scene.

By then, it was chaos. Paramedics raced up the stairs to bring down anyone who couldn't make it on their own feet. Children and expectant fathers stumbled out the doors to an apocalyptic scene of blackened trees, smoldering earth and a crater big enough to swallow a truck.

Vishegirskaaya was already outside, hugging a blanket around her shoulders. When an AP journalist with a camera asked how she was, she answered "Fine," then went off to try and retrieve her belongings from the hospital. In the interview with Russian media, she falsely said she told AP journalists she did not want to be filmed.

Sergei Chernobrivets, a paramedic who was on the scene that day, described the injuries to multiple women. He said he wasn't in a position to determine the source of the explosions, but he confirmed the extensive damage to the hospital compound.

Dr. Yulia Kucheruk, one of the maternity ward's physicians, said a nurse suffered a concussion and another medical worker was shellshocked. There was no point staying behind to try and retrieve usable medical supplies, she added, because "it was all trashed, in chaos." Kucheruk spoke only briefly about a day that remains painful to revisit.

Several women were transferred to another hospital, including Vishegirskaaya and a woman with a fractured pelvis who died along with her unborn child the same day. Vishegirskaaya gave birth the next day to a girl.

By then, the Russian misinformation campaign was in full swing. The country's embassy in the United Kingdom shared the AP's photos of Vishegirskaaya and another woman wounded on a stretcher, placing the word "FAKE" over the images and claiming that Vishegirskaaya had posed in both in "realistic makeup." The misinformation was repeated by Russian ambassadors in other parts of the world.

Russia blames Ukrainian shelling for attacks on hospitals, including the one on the maternity ward in Mariupol, although their story of the violence that day has shifted over time.

Twisting the truth about war crimes is a deliberate Russian tactic, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his nightly address on Monday, just three days after Vishegirskaaya's interview was released in Russian media.

"They have already launched a campaign of fakes to hide their guilt of mass killing of civilians in Mariupol," he said.

The hospital was struck again on March 17, and four or five of the patients lining the corridors were killed, Mykhailenko said. With no one to fetch the bodies, they were buried on the hospital grounds.

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Days later, in despair and with a leg ailment increasingly making it hard for her to run from shelling, she and her family packed up what little they had left and piled into the car.

At the first checkpoint, her phone was wiped. At the second, their belongings were searched and their sole knife was seized. They picked their way through a minefield where a car had blown up the previous day. More than two weeks later, they made it to safety in Poland.

On March 24, Kucheruk also drove out and headed for western Ukraine. She passed through 20 Russian checkpoints, including one where her cell phone was searched and its contents deleted.

Now the bulk of Mariupol's doctors have fled, and the city is left without a single fully functioning hospital. They have lost the lives and the careers that they had built, and can only hope against hope to one day return to their destroyed city.

"All your life turned into a pile of ruins in one instant, everything that was dear to you, everything you were trying to do, everything you were trying to achieve," Mykhailenko said. "Everything got canceled simply because some guy threw this bomb after another bastard gave this order."

NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Video does not show staged bodies in Bucha

CLAIM: A video filmed from a moving car in the Ukrainian city of Bucha shows dead bodies moving in the street, including one body "waving" its hand and another rolling over.

THE FACTS: Following Russian troops' withdrawal from the city, social media users are sharing a low-quality, edited clip that's being used as propaganda. The original video shows the bodies were not moving, according to a review by The Associated Press and an analysis by an independent expert. Russian troops withdrew from towns around the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv last week after Moscow said it was focusing its offensive on the country's east. Ukrainian officials said after the departure the bodies of 410 civilians were discovered, some with bound hands, close-range gunshot wounds and signs of torture. Russian government-linked accounts on social media employed a familiar strategy of denial, suggesting the scenes from Yablonska Street in Bucha, a city northwest of the capital, were staged and calling reports of such atrocities a "hoax." Other social media users and at least one Russian government official seized on a specific video that had been circulating on Telegram and Twitter, falsely claiming it showed one dead body "suddenly" waving its hand and another body seeming to "rise" from its position on the street. But an analysis of a clearer version shows the bodies were not moving. The first body said to be moving is seen to the right side of the vehicle, as the camera is recording through the windshield, which is spotted with dirt, water droplets and other markings. As the car approaches, a white mark appears to move across the body's torso, which social media users claimed showed its hand waving. In the poor quality version of the video, the clip slows down, zooms in and then plays forwards and in reverse several times to emphasize the speck's movement over the torso. But the original video shows the white spot is on the windshield and happens to briefly align with the body. In the second part of the clip, the cameraperson films the street from the reflection in the right-hand side-view mirror, showing a body in the street. Social media users falsely claimed the body could be seen standing up. The video is replayed forward and backward in slow motion to emphasize the warped reflection from the side-view mirror and to give a sense of movement. Hany Farid, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, whose work focuses on digital forensics and misinformation, reviewed the video and confirmed that there is no indication either body moved. "What we are seeing is rain on the windshield that just happens to align with the body in the road," Farid wrote in an email to the AP. "As for the portion from the side-view mirror, the video is so badly distorted due to the car motion, rain, and video compression, that it is impossible to even plausibly claim the body is moving." Further, satellite imagery provided to the AP by Maxar Technologies from March 19 shows multiple

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dark objects, comparable in size and shape to human bodies, on Yablonska Street in the same positions, well before the video was posted and Russia says its troops left town on March 30.

— Associated Press writers Arijeta Lajka in New York and Sophia Tulp in Atlanta contributed this report.

Wisconsin school district does not have 'furry protocol'

CLAIM: The Waunakee Community School District in a suburb of Madison, Wisconsin, has a "furry protocol" that allows students who identify as "furries" to opt out of speaking in class, sit and lick their paws during gym class and bark and growl in hallways.

THE FACTS: The district does not have a protocol for students who identify as animals, and it does not allow disruptions at school, according to Superintendent Randy Guttenberg. The baseless rumor that students who dress up as animals are getting special treatment in a Wisconsin school district began circulating widely after a conservative radio host said she'd received an email about the issue last month. Vicki McKenna, who hosts a show on a Madison AM radio station, said on a March 17 podcast that she received an email from a grandparent of students in the Waunakee Community School District saying the students were being told to "normalize" the behavior of classmates who preferred to dress and act like animals. "The Furries can choose whether they want to speak in class or not," read part of the purported email, shared onscreen in a video version of the podcast hosted by a University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, professor. The email went on to make several other unsubstantiated claims. But the assertions are completely false, according to Guttenberg, who clarified in an email to the AP that "the Waunakee Community School District does not have protocols for Furries, nor do we allow disruptions in our school and classrooms." McKenna did not respond to an emailed request for comment. The bogus claim comes as lawmakers and political candidates have shared similar misinformation about student "furries" in Michigan, Nebraska and other Wisconsin school districts amid the culture wars and legislative action involving gender identification in schools. Social media comments claiming students who identify as animals are being allowed to use the restrooms incorrectly in Wisconsin's Denmark School District, Green Bay Area Public School District and Pulaski School District are unfounded, administrators in those districts told the AP. Craig Janssen, a school board candidate in Denmark School District southeast of Green Bay, advanced the false narrative with a statement on his campaign website ahead of elections Tuesday about "bodily excretion nonsense that would cause your jaw to drop" happening in local schools. Janssen did not immediately respond to a request for comment. District Administrator Luke Goral said his staff investigated a rumor that a student urinated on the floor of a school restroom and found no evidence to support it. He said none of the staff in the district have reported students causing a disruption by behaving like animals on campus. A separate false claim that a western New York school put a litter box in a restroom for students who identify as animals also spread online this week.

— Associated Press writer Ali Swenson in New York contributed this report.

Headline misrepresents a California reproductive health bill

CLAIM: A California bill would allow mothers to kill their babies up to seven days after birth.

THE FACTS: The bill in the California legislature, AB 2223, is being falsely represented. It does not legalize the killing of infants. Social media users made the false claim while sharing a headline that incorrectly suggested the proposed bill would legalize "infanticide." "California introduces new bill that would allow mothers to kill their babies up to 7 days after birth," reads the erroneous headline of a story published by the Miami Standard, a conservative website. But that's not what the legislation would do. The bill eliminates a requirement that a coroner must investigate deaths related to suspected self-induced or criminal abortion. Coroner statements on certificates for a fetal death could not be used to pursue a criminal case against the mother. The bill was introduced by Assemblywoman Buffy Wicks, a Democrat representing the East Bay. Its aim is to protect women who end a pregnancy or have a miscarriage from being investigated, persecuted or incarcerated, according to Erin Ivie, a spokesperson for Wicks told The Associated Press. "The bill is specific to pregnancy and pregnancy-related outcomes, and does not decriminalize the 'murder of babies' in the weeks after birth," Ivie said. Social media users making the false claim cite a line

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in the bill stating that a person would not have criminal liability in the event of "perinatal death," a period of time following a birth. The bill does not establish a time frame around "perinatal." The Miami Standard article defines the period as "up to seven days or more." The outlet wrote in a response to the AP that, "Perinatal is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as at or around the time of birth. This could extend up to 28 days after the infant has been born." The outlet included statements by several attorneys from pro-life organizations arguing the wording could decriminalize killing infants. But the term "perinatal death" in the bill is intended to mean the death of an infant caused by complications in pregnancy, according to Ivie. To clarify the term, Wicks added a new amendment to the bill on Monday, changing the wording to, "perinatal death due to a pregnancy-related cause." Even without the new amendment, the bill wouldn't have allowed for "infanticide" or murder of an infant days after it's born, since homicide is illegal, according to Farah Diaz-Tello, senior counsel and legal director at If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice. A case where the bill might apply would be if a pregnant woman who exhibited signs of preterm labor could not afford to be on bed rest, Ivie said. While there could be a chance that the delivery results in a stillborn, the bill would ensure the woman couldn't be prosecuted if that did occur, Ivie explained. "Anti-abortion activists are peddling an absurd and disingenuous argument that this bill is about killing newborns when ironically, the part of the bill they're pointing to is about protecting and supporting parents experiencing the grief of pregnancy loss," Wicks added. On Tuesday, the amended bill passed through the Assembly Judiciary committee and moved to the health committee hearings.

— Associated Press writer Karena Phan in New York contributed this report.

No relationship between COVID-19 vaccines and AIDS

CLAIM: COVID-19 vaccines are causing a form of AIDS that is not related to HIV, long established as the cause of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.

THE FACTS: There is no evidence that the COVID-19 vaccines cause any kind of immune deficiency condition, let alone AIDS, nor is there evidence that the COVID-19 vaccines damage the immune system, experts say. In a video circulating widely on social media, Dr. Robert Malone, a frequent critic of COVID-19 vaccines who once researched mRNA vaccine technology, made the claim that the vaccines are "damaging T cell responses" and "causing a form of AIDS." "People think, when they hear AIDS, they hear HIV. No, the vaccines aren't causing you to be infected with the HIV virus," said Malone, during a taped interview with a website that focuses on COVID-19. "They are causing a form of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, that's what AIDS stands for." In the interview, published April 1, Malone claimed that "lots of scientific data" support his claim, but cited no evidence. The claims are unfounded. As The Associated Press previously reported, there is no evidence that COVID-19 vaccines damage the immune system or cause AIDS, and there is also no evidence that the vaccines are causing a form of AIDS that doesn't stem from HIV, experts tell the AP. John Swartzberg, a clinical professor of infectious diseases and vaccinology at the University of California, Berkeley, said he knows of "no data" showing that mRNA vaccines cause immunodeficiency of any kind, including AIDS. "What is widely accepted is that vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines, cause short-term immune activation, not deficiency," Richard E. Chaisson, the director of the Johns Hopkins Center for AIDS Research, wrote in an email. "Dr. Malone is distorting and misrepresenting data." The AP has previously reported on false claims that COVID-19 vaccines damage T cells. Research shows the vaccines boost the immune response. HIV attacks the body's immune system, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It is often spread through sexual contact, shared or contaminated needles and infected blood. If untreated, it can lead to AIDS. Both Chaisson and Swartzberg wrote that the term "AIDS" is strictly used to describe the condition caused by HIV. Chaisson described Malone's use of the term as "deliberately provocative and irresponsible." There are forms of inherited immunodeficiency, such as severe combined immunodeficiency, that result in life-threatening infections, Chaisson noted. But, he said, there is no evidence that these conditions are caused by COVID-19 vaccines. Malone did not respond to a request for comment.

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Boris Becker found guilty over bankruptcy, could face jail

LONDON (AP) — Tennis great Boris Becker could face a jail sentence after being found guilty on Friday of illicitly moving thousands of dollars from a bank account after he was declared bankrupt.

A jury at London's Southwark Crown Court convicted Becker on four charges under the Insolvency Act, including removal of property, concealing debt and two counts of failing to disclose estate.

The German star was found to have transferred hundreds of thousands of pounds (dollars) after his June 2017 bankruptcy from his business account to other accounts, including those of his ex-wife Barbara and estranged wife Sharley "Lilly" Becker.

He was also convicted of failing to declare a property in Germany and hiding an 825,000 euro (\$895,000) bank loan and shares in a tech firm.

He was acquitted on 20 other counts, including charges that he failed to hand over his many awards, including two Wimbledon trophies and an Olympic gold medal.

The six-time Grand Slam champion had denied all the charges, saying he had cooperated with trustees tasked with securing his assets - even offering up his wedding ring - and had acted on expert advice.

Becker's bankruptcy stemmed from a 4.6 million euro (\$5 million) loan from a private bank in 2013, as well as about \$1.6 million borrowed from a British businessman the year after, according to testimony at the trial.

During the trial Becker, 54, said his \$50 million career earnings had been swallowed up by payments for an "expensive divorce" and debts when he lost large chunks of his income after retirement.

He said he had "expensive lifestyle commitments" including a house in Wimbledon that cost 22,000 pounds (\$28,800) in rent each month. But he said bad publicity had damaged "brand Becker," making it hard for him to earn enough to pay off his debts.

"(It is) very difficult when you are bankrupt and in the headlines every week for it," he told the jury. "(It is) very difficult to make a lot of money with my name."

The charges carry a maximum sentence of seven years in prison. Becker was granted bail until a sentencing hearing on April 29.

Inflation hits nonprofits' services, ability to fundraise

By DAN PARKS of The Chronicle of Philanthropy

Last Mile Food Rescue in Cincinnati started shopping in November for a refrigerated box truck to move perishable donations from food retailers to distribution sites. The purchase would take some of the pressure off overstretched volunteers, who would have to make three or more runs in their cars to haul as much food as a single truckload.

But Last Mile is experiencing sticker shock. Prices for the kind of truck its leaders have in mind have soared thousands of dollars in recent months, to as much as \$80,000. For an organization with an annual budget of \$650,000, that's too big a hit to absorb.

Frustrated, the charity started looking for used trucks, but the prices of used vehicles have shot up as well.

"We look every day," says Julie Shifman, Last Mile's executive director. "We hope that we will be able to afford it, or a major donor might be able to come in to help us."

Last Mile is far from alone. Nonprofits of all kinds are getting hit hard by inflation, experts say. Price and wage increases are hurting nonprofits in multiple ways, making it harder to keep up with their own basic operational expenses while also forcing them to curtail the services they provide.

At the same time, there are early signs that the burst of generosity donors showed in the first year of the pandemic may be slowing considerably.

"It's not a pretty equation," says Shannon McCracken, chief executive of the Nonprofit Alliance, an advocacy group.

Nonprofits that provide annual cost-of-living increases for their workers, as many do, are getting hit with higher payroll costs of about 6% even without any increase based on merit or seniority, McCracken says.

David Lipsetz, CEO at the Housing Assistance Council, says inflation has eaten into the number of

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affordable-housing units his organization can provide.

The council underwrites loans for housing developments at below-market rates in some of the poorest regions of the country, and it strives to maximize the amount of housing it can build with limited resources. "We're operating on extraordinarily thin margins," says Lipsetz. "We are putting those loans out the door as cheaply as we can."

When the price of building materials goes up 10%, says Lipsetz, there's usually no room in the loan to accommodate that increase. Lipsetz says that sometimes his nonprofit can rework the terms of the loan or find additional sources of financing, but it doesn't always work out.

"It's stalled countless projects for us, right in the middle of a period of time when housing and shelter are the most important things needed to weather the storm of a pandemic," says Lipsetz. "For us, a modest increase in costs can shut down a project in an area of the country where it's needed the most."

Jesse Tree, a nonprofit in Boise, Idaho, that pays rent for people who are on the verge of being evicted, has seen sharp increases in demand for assistance in recent years. Ali Rabe, the organization's executive director, says research shows housing prices in her region shot up 75% from 2015 to 2020 at a time when local wages increased 18%.

The situation has only gotten worse since 2020, says Rabe. Work-at-home policies spurred by the pandemic allowed highly paid urban dwellers to relocate to rural areas, she says, and housing prices shot up another 40% or so last year.

Local courts in the Treasury Valley region of southwestern Idaho, which Jesse Tree serves, hold about 20 eviction hearings a week, says Rabe.

"We can only help about a quarter of people who apply for assistance," she says.

A government grant provided through federal Covid assistance helped the nonprofit maintain operations, but that grant expires in September, says Rabe. The nonprofit is hoping donors will fill the gap, she says.

Nonprofits by their nature are in a poor position to adapt to rising costs, experts say. While McDonald's can offset higher beef costs by raising the cost of a Big Mac, for many nonprofits the only options are to cut services or hope donors will come to the rescue.

Kelley Kuhn, CEO of the Michigan Nonprofit Association, says nonprofits that provide basic goods and services, like food and housing, are being hit the hardest. At the same time, nonprofits are struggling to retain workers who are being lured away by businesses that are able to offer higher salaries, says Kuhn.

"That's something any nonprofit is experiencing now, trying to keep up with the requests for higher salaries and wages," Kuhn says. She added that a passion for the mission won't keep nonprofit workers from seeking higher wages elsewhere if they can't meet basic living expenses.

"That's a lot of strain on human capital happening for nonprofits," she says.

Billionaire philanthropist Mackenzie Scott recently took the sting of inflation away for some nonprofits with another round of major gifts. The Housing Assistance Council, for example, got \$7 million. And Habitat for Humanity, which has had to scale back the number of houses it builds due to increased costs of lumber and land, got \$439 million, which will allow it to reverse course and ramp up operations.

Corinne O'Connell, CEO of Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia, says the cost of replacing a roof on a row house shot up from \$5,000 to \$8,500 in a single year. And while her local affiliate of Habitat for Humanity received \$5 million of Scott's gift, she notes that most nonprofits can't count on getting bailed out by a generous billionaire. "The screws just keep tightening on nonprofits who are working on the front lines," O'Connell says.

Like Shifman at Last Mile, Diana Lara leads a charity that collects and distributes food that was otherwise headed for the garbage. Lara's Southern California nonprofit Food Finders has three trucks and a van, all refrigerated, and the fuel costs are gobbling up a bigger share of its budget.

At the same time, grocery stores are hanging onto perishable food longer, she says. Food that previously would have been donated is getting marked down for a quick sale instead.

The group purchases some nonperishable food to supplement donated goods, and those costs are rising, says Lara. Meanwhile new hires are demanding higher starting pay.

In short, a wide array of expenses are over budget.

"So we're starting to feel that in our pockets," she says. "It's just insane."

Food prices soar to record levels on Ukraine war disruptions

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Prices for food commodities like grains and vegetable oils reached their highest levels ever last month largely because of Russia's war in Ukraine and the "massive supply disruptions" it is causing, threatening millions of people in Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere with hunger and malnourishment, the United Nations said Friday.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said its Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in international prices for a basket of commodities, averaged 159.3 points last month, up 12.6% from February. As it is, the February index was the highest level since its inception in 1990.

FAO said the war in Ukraine was largely responsible for the 17.1% rise in the price of grains, including wheat and others like oats, barley and corn. Together, Russia and Ukraine account for around 30% and 20% of global wheat and corn exports, respectively.

While predictable given February's steep rise, "this is really remarkable," said Josef Schmidhuber, deputy director of FAO's markets and trade division. "Clearly, these very high prices for food require urgent action."

The biggest price increases were for vegetable oils: that price index rose 23.2%, driven by higher quotations for sunflower seed oil that is used for cooking. Ukraine is the world's leading exporter of sunflower oil, and Russia is No. 2.

"There is, of course, a massive supply disruption, and that massive supply disruption from the Black Sea region has fueled prices for vegetable oil," Schmidhuber told reporters in Geneva.

He said he couldn't calculate how much the war was to blame for the record food prices, noting that poor weather conditions in the United States and China also were blamed for crop concerns. But he said "logistical factors" were playing a big role.

"Essentially, there are no exports through the Black Sea, and exports through the Baltics is practically also coming to an end," he said.

Soaring food prices and disruption to supplies coming from Russia and Ukraine have threatened food shortages in countries in the Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia where many people already were not getting enough to eat.

Those nations rely on affordable supplies of wheat and other grains from the Black Sea region to feed millions of people who subsist on subsidized bread and bargain noodles, and they now face the possibility of further political instability.

Other large grain producers like the United States, Canada, France, Australia and Argentina are being closely watched to see if they can quickly ramp up production to fill in the gaps, but farmers face issues like climbing fuel and fertilizer costs exacerbated by the war, drought and supply chain disruptions.

In the Sahel region of Central and West Africa, the disruptions from the war have added to an already precarious food situation caused by COVID-19, conflicts, poor weather and other structural problems, said Sib Ollo, senior researcher for the World Food Program for West and Central Africa in Dakar, Senegal.

"There is a sharp deterioration of the food and nutrition security in the region," he told reporters, saying 6 million children are malnourished and nearly 16 million people in urban areas are at risk of food insecurity.

Farmers, he said, were particularly worried that they would not be able to access fertilizers produced in the Black Sea region. Russia is a leading global exporter.

"The cost of fertilizers has increased by almost 30% in many places of this region due to the supply disruption that we see provoked by a crisis in Ukraine," he said.

The World Food Program has appealed for \$777 million to meet the needs of 22 million people in the Sahel region and Nigeria over six months, he said.

To address the needs of food-importing countries, the FAO was developing a proposal for a mechanism to alleviate the import costs for the poorest countries, Schmidhuber said. The proposal calls for eligible

countries to commit to added investments in their own agricultural productivity to obtain import credits to help soften the blow.

Why this week's French elections matter to the wider world

By THOMAS ADAMSON undefined

PARIS (AP) — With war singeing the European Union's eastern edge, French voters will be casting ballots in a presidential election whose outcome will have international implications. France is the 27-member bloc's second economy, the only one with a UN Security Council veto, and its sole nuclear power. And as Russian President Vladimir Putin carries on with the war in Ukraine, French power will help shape Europe's response.

Twelve candidates are vying for the presidency -- including incumbent and favorite President Emmanuel Macron who is seeking a new term amid a challenge from the far-right.

Here's why the French election, taking place in two rounds starting Sunday, matters:

NATO

Russia's war in Ukraine has afforded Macron the chance to demonstrate his influence on the international stage and burnish his pro-NATO credentials in election debates. Macron is the only front-runner who supports the alliance while other candidates hold differing views on France's role within it, including abandoning it entirely. Such a development would deal a huge blow to an alliance built to protect its members in the then emerging Cold War 73 years ago.

Despite declaring NATO's "brain death" in 2019, the war in Ukraine has prompted Macron to try and infuse the alliance with a renewed sense of purpose.

"Macron really wants to create a European pillar of NATO," says Susi Dennison, Senior Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. "He's used it for his shuttle diplomacy over the Ukraine conflict."

On the far-left, candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon wants to quit NATO outright, saying that it produces nothing but squabbles and instability. A NATO-skeptic President Melenchon might be a concern especially for Poland, which has a 1,160-kilometer border with territory now controlled by Russia.

Several other candidates want to see either diminished engagement with the alliance or a full withdrawal. Although unlikely, France's departure from NATO would create a deep chasm with its allies and alienate the United States.

EUROPEAN COOPERATION

Observers say a Macron re-election would spell real likelihood for increased cooperation and investment in European security and defense — especially with a new pro-EU German government.

Under Macron's watch, France's defense spending has risen by €7 billion euros (\$7.6 billion) with a target to raise it to 2% of gross domestic product -- something that leaders including Putin are watching closely. In his second term, Macron would almost certainly want to build up a joint European response to Ukraine and head off Russian threats.

A FAR RIGHT ALLIANCE?

This election could reshape France's post-war identity and indicate whether European populism is ascendant or in decline. With populist Viktor Orban winning a fourth consecutive term as Hungary's prime minister days ago, eyes have now turned to France's resurgent far right candidates -- especially National Rally leader Marine Le Pen who wants to ban Muslim headscarves in streets, and halal and kosher butchers, and drastically reduce immigration from outside Europe.

"If a far-right candidate wins, it could create some sort of alliance or axis in Europe," said Dennison, of the European Council on Foreign Relations. "Le Pen has been tweeting pictures of herself shaking hands with Orban in recent days. She is championing a Europe of strong nation states."

That axis might include Poland's President Andrzej Duda, a right-wing populist and ally of Donald Trump. It has alarmed observers.

"Over 30 percent of French voters right now say they are going to vote for a far right candidate. If you include Melenchon as another extreme, anti-system candidate — that's almost half the entire voting

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population. It is unprecedented," Dennison said.

Far right candidate Eric Zemmour has dominated the French airwaves with his controversial views on Islam in France and immigration.

However, even centrist Macron ruffled feathers in Muslim countries two years ago when he defended the right to publish cartoons of the prophet Muhammad. That came during a homage to a teacher beheaded by a fundamentalist for showing the cartoons to his pupils as part of a class on free speech.

A FRIEND OF AMERICA

The US often touts France as its oldest ally -- and from Russian sanctions to climate change and the United Nations, Washington needs a reliable partner in Paris. France is a vital trans-Atlantic friend for America, not least for its status as continental Europe's only permanent UN Security Council member wielding veto power.

Despite the bitter US-France spat last year over a multibillion deal to supply Australia with submarines -- which saw France humiliated -- President Joe Biden and Macron are now on solid terms.

"Macron is obviously the only candidate that has history and credentials in the US relationship. All the others would be starting from scratch at a time of great geopolitical uncertainty," said Dennison..

Unlike Macron, an Elysee in the hands of Zemmour or Le Pen would likely mean less preoccupation with issues that the U.S. considers a priority such as climate change. "They might not prioritize the large economic cost of keeping the Paris Climate Agreement alive and the potential to limit global warming to 1.5%," Dennison added.

MIGRATION IN THE CONTINENT

In light of a huge migrant influx into Europe last year, France's position on migration will continue to strongly impact countries on its periphery and beyond. This is especially so because of its geographical location as a leg on the journey of many migrants to the U.K.

A migrant vessel capsized in the English Channel last November killing 27 people, leading to a spat between France and the U.K. over who bore responsibility. The British accused France of not patrolling the coast well enough, yet Macron said this was an impossible task. Observers consider France not to be a particularly open to migrants within a European context and see Macron as a relative hardliner on migration.

But Le Pen or Zemmour would likely usher in tougher policies than Macron if they either emerges victorious, such as slashing social allocations to non-French citizens and capping the number of asylum seekers. Some candidates have supported a Trump-style construction of border fences.

Malaysia races to find 3 European divers, family optimistic

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — A plane, fishermen and jet skiers joined an expanded search entering a third day Friday for three Europeans, including two teenagers, who disappeared while diving off a southern Malaysian island.

Authorities were hopeful of finding them after Norwegian diving instructor Kristine Grodem was rescued Thursday. She said the four of them surfaced safely Wednesday afternoon but later drifted away from the boat and were separated by a strong current.

The group was diving about 15 meters (50 feet) deep at an island off the town of Mersing in southern Johor state. Grodem, 35, was rescued by a tugboat about 22 nautical miles (40 kilometers) from the dive site.

The missing divers are Alexia Alexandra Molina, 18, of France; Adrian Peter Chesters, 46, of Britain; and his Dutch son, Nathen Renze Chesters, 14.

Authorities deployed a Bombardier jet that can fly longer and cover more area in an expanded search, said First Adm. Nurul Hizam Zakaria, Johor director of the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency. The plane was in addition to three helicopters, 11 boats and some 100 personnel including rescue divers.

Zakaria said members of the public have also lent support, with fishermen and 10 jet skis helping to comb the sea. The weather was reported to be fair. "It's been three days since they went missing but we will not give up. We hope all of them will be rescued," Zakaria said.

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The search was halted Friday night, and will resume early Saturday. Maritime officials said Grodem was providing training for the other three, who were seeking to obtain advanced diving licenses.

The family of French teenager Molina, who resides in Johor, has meanwhile sought support from private boat owners to join the search. Esther Molina, 57, said she was optimistic that her daughter, who loves the sea, was still alive.

"My daughter is strong, she is smart. So now, we can only wait for developments," Esther was quoted as saying by national Bernama news agency. She said Alexia was due to attend a fashion college in Kuala Lumpur next month.

The boat skipper was detained for further investigation, and diving activities off Mersing have been suspended. There are several islands off the town that are popular dive spots for local residents and tourists.

Malaysia's borders reopened to foreigners on April 1 after being closed for more than two years during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today in History: April 9, Lee surrenders to Grant

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, April 9, the 99th day of 2022. There are 266 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 9, 1865, Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his army to Union Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House in Virginia.

On this date:

In 1413, the coronation of England's King Henry V took place in Westminster Abbey.

In 1939, Marian Anderson performed a concert at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., after the Black singer was denied the use of Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

In 1940, during World War II, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway.

In 1942, during World War II, some 75,000 Philippine and American defenders on Bataan surrendered to Japanese troops, who forced the prisoners into what became known as the Bataan Death March; thousands died or were killed en route.

In 1959, NASA presented its first seven astronauts: Scott Carpenter, Gordon Cooper, John Glenn, Gus Grissom, Wally Schirra, Alan Shepard and Donald Slayton. Architect Frank Lloyd Wright, 91, died in Phoenix, Arizona.

In 1968, funeral services, private and public, were held for Martin Luther King Jr. at the Ebenezer Baptist Church and Morehouse College in Atlanta, five days after the civil rights leader was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

In 1979, officials declared an end to the crisis involving the Three Mile Island Unit 2 nuclear reactor in Pennsylvania, 12 days after a partial core meltdown.

In 1996, in a dramatic shift of purse-string power, President Bill Clinton signed a line-item veto bill into law. (However, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the veto in 1998.)

In 2003, jubilant Iraqis celebrated the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, beheading a toppled statue of their longtime ruler in downtown Baghdad and embracing American troops as liberators.

In 2005, Britain's Prince Charles married longtime love Camilla Parker Bowles, who took the title Duchess of Cornwall.

In 2010, Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens announced his retirement. (His vacancy was filled by Elena Kagan.)

In 2020, the government reported that 6.6 million people had sought unemployment benefits in the preceding week, bringing the total to 16.8 million in the three weeks since the coronavirus outbreak took hold. The Food and Drug Administration sent a warning letter to conspiracy theorist and radio host Alex Jones, telling him to stop pitching bogus remedies for the coronavirus.

Ten years ago: A Florida special prosecutor said a grand jury would not look into the Trayvon Martin

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case, leaving the decision of whether to charge the teen's shooter in her hands alone. (Prosecutor Angela Corey ended up filing second-degree murder charges against George Zimmerman, who pleaded not guilty, claiming self-defense; Zimmerman was acquitted at trial.)

Five years ago: Suicide bombers struck hours apart at two Coptic churches in northern Egypt, killing 43 people and turning Palm Sunday services into scenes of horror and outrage. Dr. David Dao, a passenger on a United Express flight about to take off for Louisville, Kentucky, was dragged off the plane by security officers at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport to make room for four airline employees; the incident was captured on video that went viral. (United reached a settlement with Dao.) Sergio Garcia beat Justin Rose in a sudden-death playoff at the Masters for his first major.

One year ago: Britain's Prince Philip, husband of Queen Elizabeth II, died at the age of 99; he was Britain's longest-serving consort. Hip-hop icon DMX died at a hospital in White Plains, New York, days after suffering what officials called a catastrophic cardiac arrest; the Grammy-nominated rapper and actor was 50. Former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark died in New York at age 93. A trio of Russian and American space travelers launched successfully from Kazakhstan and reached the International Space Station. Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear signed a partial ban on no-knock warrants a year after the fatal shooting of Breonna Taylor. The National Labor Relations Board said workers at an Amazon warehouse in Alabama had voted against forming a union. San Diego Padres right-hander Joe Musgrove pitched the first no-hitter in the team's history, a 3-0 win over the Texas Rangers.

Today's Birthdays: Satirical songwriter and mathematician Tom Lehrer is 94. Actor Michael Learned is 83. Country singer Margo Smith is 80. Actor Dennis Quaid is 68. Comedian Jimmy Tingle is 67. Country musician Dave Innis (Restless Heart) is 63. Talk show host Joe Scarborough is 59. Actor-sports reporter Lisa Guerrero is 58. Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey is 58. Actor Mark Pellegrino is 57. Actor-model Paulina Porizkova is 57. Actor Cynthia Nixon is 56. Rock singer Kevin Martin (Candlebox) is 53. TV personality Sunny Anderson is 47. Rock singer Gerard Way (My Chemical Romance) is 45. Actor Keshia Knight Pulliam is 43. Rock musician Albert Hammond Jr. (The Strokes) is 42. Actor Charlie Hunnam is 42. Actor Ryan Northcott is 42. Actor Arlen Escarpeta is 41. Actor Jay Baruchel is 40. Actor Annie Funke is 37. Actor Jordan Masterson is 36. Actor Leighton Meester is 36. Actor-singer Jesse McCartney is 35. R&B singer Jazmine Sullivan is 35. Actor Kristen Stewart is 32. Actor Elle Fanning is 24. Rapper Lil Nas X is 23. Actor Isaac Hempstead Wright is 23. Classical crossover singer Jackie Evancho (ee-VAYN'-koh) is 22.