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UpComing Events

Thursday, April 14

Emmanuel: 7 p.m.: Worship with 1st communion for youth

St. John's: 7 p.m. Worship with communion

SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.

Catholic: 5:00pm Turton, 8:30am Groton

School Breakfast: muffins.

School Lunch: Tacos.

Senior Menu: Sweet and sour pork, steamed rice, carrot and broccoli medley, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

Friday, April 15 - Good Friday

No School, Groton City & States offices closed

7 p.m.: Worship at Emmanuel with Methodist & CM&A.

St. John's: 7 p.m. worship

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



“A good laugh is a mighty good thing, a rather too scarce a good thing.”

-Herman Melville

Saturday, April 16

Groton High School Baseball vs. Howard at 2 p.m. and Oldham/Ramona/Rutland/Arlington at 4 p.m.

Emmanuel: 10 a.m.: Rosewood Court

SEAS Confession: 3:45-4:15 p.m.

SEAS Mass: 4:30 p.m.

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

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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High Wind Warning

URGENT - WEATHER MESSAGE
National Weather Service Aberdeen SD
516 AM CDT Thu Apr 14 2022

MNZ039-046-SDZ006>008-011-018>023-142100-
/O.CON.KABR.HW.W.0004.000000T0000Z-220415T0000Z/
Traverse-Big Stone-Brown-Marshall-Roberts-Day-Spink-Clark- Codington-Grant-Hamlin-Deuel-
Including the cities of Wheaton, Ortonville, Aberdeen, Britton, Sisseton, Webster, Redfield, Clark, Wa-
tertown, Milbank, Hayti, and Clear Lake
516 AM CDT Thu Apr 14 2022

...HIGH WIND WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT UNTIL 7 PM CDT THIS EVENING...

* WHAT...West winds 35 to 45 mph with gusts up to 60 mph.

* WHERE...Portions of northeast South Dakota and west central Minnesota.

* WHEN...Until 7 PM CDT this evening.

* IMPACTS...High winds may move loose debris, damage property and cause power outages. Travel will be difficult especially for high profile vehicles. Visibility may be reduced to less than one mile at times as snow showers move through today.

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

People are urged to secure loose objects that could be blown around or damaged by the wind.

**HELP
WANTED!**

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

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The demolition of the Groton pool has begun. The plaster will be removed and replaced later this month. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Rule changes approved for high school golf and track

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — In the future the South Dakota High School Activities Association may seek some consistency in the way that the state's golfers qualify for state tournaments. That suggestion was made Wednesday as SDHSAA board members approved the annual changes to the organization's athletic handbook.

Prior to last year, 60% of Class A golfers qualified for the state tournament. Last April, the board approved a rule change reducing the field to 50%. At the time, SDHSAA staff said tournament days were taking longer than six hours with some golfers on the course who didn't belong in a state tournament.

This year, a request from Class A athletic directors sought a return to the 60% number or, barring that, a redistribution of athletes if a region doesn't send a full complement of golfers to the state tournament.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos cautioned the board against approving the return to the 60% qualifying field since there was not yet a full year of data on the change. The A and AA boys' golf tournaments took place in October while the B boys and girls and the A and AA girls will play theirs in June.

"We're not even through the first year of this," Swartos said.

Board member Terry Rotert of Huron said coaches were upset because the Class A field of golfers at the state tournament was "significantly smaller than it could have been."

Swartos said last year's change was approved by athletic directors, but golf coaches didn't like it. "Once the A coaches got wind of it this fall, all heck broke loose."

Rotert explained that if the field isn't increased to 60% of golfers, the athletic directors would like to be able to add golfers in their region if one of the regions doesn't send all 50% of its golfers. Rotert said a region with 100 golfers would be allowed to send 50 to the state tournament. If it didn't send them all, the other regions would add golfers equally among themselves in order to send as many golfers as possible to the state tournament.

That change was approved by the board on a 7-1 vote with the dissent coming from Marty Weismantel of Groton.

During the discussion, board member Derek Barrios of Elk Point-Jefferson asked if there was any way to get continuity across classes. He asked if the association could look at "how golf is run in our state as a whole."

Swartos said that each class uses a different formula. Class B takes 40% of golfers. AA calculates those golfers that are within 75% of the average state tournament score to determine tournament qualifiers.

In the area of track and field, the board approved using fully automatic timing at all AA state qualifying track meets. The vote by AA athletic directors was 16-3 on this change. SDHSAA Assistant Activities Director Randy Soma said the schools that voted against the change were likely concerned about hiring more people to run the meet and the expense of the FAT system.

"There's so much inconsistency with handheld time," said board chairman Tom Culver of Avon, noting that his school district rents out its FAT system for \$600. "I know there's others that charge a lot more."

Board member Kelly Messmer of Harding County said he has used a handheld device to time races at track meets. "It's a disservice to the kids," Messmer said. "I'm not very good at it."

SDHSAA will do more research on the automatic timing systems.

"We need to find out how many systems we have across the state," said SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Jo Auch.

At the urging of Swartos, the board tabled a request from athletic directors to change the out-of-bounds rule in wrestling. Under the proposed rule, if any part of the wrestler is within the circle, the wrestler would be consider in-bounds.

Swartos said the proposed rule deviates from the rules set by the National Federation of State High School Associations. The NFHS is considering the change in its rules review process. Swartos said the proposed rule would be back on the board's agenda for its June meeting.

Plan to move cheer and dance, cross-country to Sioux Falls, Rapid City changed

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — A plan to rotate the state cheer and dance and cross-country meets between Sioux Falls and Rapid City was nixed on Wednesday by the board of directors of the South Dakota High School Activities Association.

The plan, as presented to board members, called for holding the 2022 cheer and dance tournament in Watertown. In 2023 it would be held at the Premier Center in Sioux Falls and it 2024 at the Rapid City Monument Center. Starting in 2025 it would rotate between Sioux Falls and Rapid City, based on the availability of a facility in one of those towns.

A similar plan for cross-country called for the state meet to be held in Huron in 2022, Sioux Falls in 2023 and Rapid City in 2024. Starting in 2025, the meet would rotate between Sioux Falls and Rapid City depending on the availability of facilities.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said moving the cross-country meet out of Huron was likely due to hotel availability. He also said that it is convenient to have cheer and dance and cross-country in the same community at the same time because this year there were four athletes that competed in both.

Board member Terry Rotert of Huron said the events didn't need to be scheduled in the same cities to accommodate fewer in than five athletes. Rotert said he found it "offensive" that smaller communities were being "squeezed out" of hosting state events.

"When we host these events, we roll out the red carpet," Rotert said. Making the change was the same as saying "now Huron isn't good enough."

Board member Mark Murphy said the cross-country coaches he has talked to prefer the Huron course. "The Huron course is by far the best," Murphy said. "That is the best facility for cross-country."

The board approved a rotation starting in 2025 that alternates between Sioux Falls, Rapid City and Watertown for cheer and dance and between Sioux Falls, Rapid City and Huron for cross-country. When Huron hosts cross-country, Watertown will host cheer and dance.

—30—

SDHSAA hopes to share more revenue with schools that host state events

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — The South Dakota High School Activities Association is trying to balance funding all of its activities with fairly compensating schools that host state events.

Wednesday the SDHSAA board of directors' discussion about funding for state event hosts was sparked by a comment from Casey Meile, coordinator of athletics for the Sioux Falls School District.

During a discussion about site selection, Meile told the board, "We lose a lot of money hosting these events while SDHSAA does profit."

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said it can look bad when a host school loses money on an event while the association turns a profit.

As an example, Swartos noted the combined state wrestling meet that Sioux Falls hosted. The association paid a hosting fee to the school district of \$24,500, Swartos said, while the district's expenses were probably twice that. The association made a \$104,000 profit on the event.

"It's the profit that we make that funds the rest of our events where we lose money," Swartos said. Those events include debate, oral interp, all-state band, tennis, golf and gymnastics. Swartos also noted

that profit from events helps fund the association's \$200,000 catastrophic insurance policy in the event an athlete is injured.

Surrounding schools benefit from Sioux Falls hosting the meet, Swartos said, because they don't have to pay transportation or lodging costs. He said those schools could be asked to provide workers for the meet, taking some of the financial burden off the Sioux Falls School District.

That could "cut down a lot of the cost of hosting that event," Swartos said.

The association expects a surplus of revenue this year. After the association's expenses are paid, Swartos said it could share that revenue with host schools.

The association would be "using our surplus we have to make those sites whole," Swartos said. He told the board that action on such a plan could be on the June agenda.

—30—

Basketball tournaments highlighted by lack of sportsmanship

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — A lack of sportsmanship was a common theme when members of the South Dakota High School Activities Association staff reported on the recent state basketball tournaments. They made their report Wednesday to the SDHSAA board of directors.

SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Jo Auch told the board that she attended the State B boys' and girls' tournaments.

"Our sportsmanship is getting pathetic," Auch said, noting that she includes players, coaches and fans in that statement. "A handful of people can make it miserable."

Auch said one fan was kicked out of a B tournament, led away in handcuffs.

SDHSAA staffers Randy Soma, who attended the AA tournaments and Dan Swartos, who attended the A tournaments, agreed with Auch's assessment.

"There's a lot of work we need to do in that area," said Swartos, the organization's executive director.

Board member Mark Murphy said he has observed coaches giving officials a hard time during games and that attitude is picked up by players.

"They take their cues from coaches," Murphy said. "I really think coaches need to help us in that sportsmanship area."

The statements were made during a portion of the board meeting set aside for staff reports. No action was taken.



Stations of the Cross presented

Members of the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church youth put on its annual "Stations of the Cross" Wednesday night.

Pictured Left to Right:

Front Row: Faith Traphagen, Brooke Gengerke, Shallyn Foertsch, Ashley Johnson, Anna Fjeldheim, Aspen Johnson, Hollie Frost

Middle Row: Andrew Marzahn, Brevin Flihs, James Brooks, Easton Ekern, Jackson Garstecki, Kaleb Hanten, Jacob Lewandowski

Back Row: Bryson Wambach, Cater Simon, Alyssa Thaler, Evin Nehls, Maddie Bjerke, Jackson Cogley, Jordan Bjerke, Megan Flihs, Kelsie Frost. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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#528 in a series Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

We should probably note first that the world passed the half-billion mark for known cases yesterday—mind-boggling. Worldwide, the percentage of new cases accounted for by the BA.2 sublineage of the Omicron variant is up to 99.2, pretty much a complete takeover.

The steady decline in 14-day new-case average in the US turned around on Friday, showing a one percent increase. Saturday, it ticked up to two percent and on Sunday, three percent. As of yesterday, the increase is up to eight percent with a seven-day new-case average of 31,567, the highest since March 15—just about a month ago and a pandemic total of 80,354, 720. We have 30 of the 56 states and territories we're tracking showing overall increases in cases, 15 by more than 50 percent in two weeks and four of those over 100 percent. Here we go again—although I do want to note that there is no evidence so far that this is going to be another huge wave and several indications it will be something smaller.

To that point, a couple of the country's top modelers are saying they don't see a big surge in cases coming this summer. These guys tend not to make strong predictions, rather speaking in terms of percentages and indications, and yet they are both seeing good signs we're going to have a quiet summer. They are Dr. Chris Murray, director of IHME, and Trevor Bedford from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, both of whom spoke at the CDC's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee meeting last week. They agree that we're probably at peak levels of protection in the population at the moment with so many people vaccinated, recently infected, or both, and there is good cross-protection between the Omicron variant's BA.1 and BA.2 sublineages. The IHME is also indicating that the current BA.2 wave is going to leave enough of the world's population previously infected to slow down transmission for a while; and we know by now that the less this virus transmits, the less it reproduces; and the less it reproduces, the less it mutates. That would be a very good thing.

They were not ruling out a good-sized uptick in infections, but they are not seeing another huge wave this summer. Of course, if another variant emerges and spreads widely, then the calculus can change; but a general down-trend in infection rates makes that possibility somewhat less likely. And by fall, everyone pretty much agrees we're going to see an increase as folks move indoors in the cooler weather. By then, it seems likely we're all going to need boosters. Still, a summer off would be quite nice. Let's hope.

Hospitalizations continue to decline although at slower rates than even a few days ago. We're now at 14,870 hospitalized, on average. We have 14 states now reporting increases in hospitalizations, up from five over the weekend. These don't track exactly with new-case rates, but given the lag are probably within territory that shouldn't scare us too much yet.

Deaths, likewise, are still declining, but at lower rates. The seven-day average is 533 with a pandemic total of 984,838. These are the numbers to watch; we do not want to see a turnaround here.

Here's something unsettling: The University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), one of the premier modeling outfits in the country, estimates that as testing and reporting have scaled back, the true number of new daily infections is likely nine times the reported number. To refresh, today's average was 31,567 new cases; you do the math. The sublineage of the Omicron variant BA.2 is now responsible for 86 percent of US cases nationwide with the highest proportions in the Northeast where it runs as high as 92 percent and rising in the Midwest where the proportion has risen from less than 15 percent just under a month ago to 83.7 percent today. This will almost certainly be followed by a further increase in new-case numbers.

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All that said, this next is just what we could have expected would happen: We have some different new sublineages of the omicron variant circulating in New York. These have Pango lineage designations of BA.2.12 and BA.2.12.1. These sub-sublineages (if that's even a word) are currently accounting for more than 90 percent of new cases in the central part of the state and have apparently turned up in more than 40 countries and 30 states in the US. While they do not appear to be causing more severe disease (although it's pretty early to be sure), they do spread even more rapidly than BA.2—about 25 percent faster. (I do find myself wondering whether there's some upper bound to the transmission rate—like “when our eyes met across the room” transmission. If so, it could give romance novel writers quite a jolt, no?) We're not sure whether these spread faster because they're better at spreading or because they're better able to evade our immune protections. We can sincerely hope it's the former. Immune evasion is really the last thing we need at the moment; but the fact is one of them has a mutation that is concerning in that regard. Nothing to do, I guess, but wait it out and see what develops. And, for the record, I'm as sick of writing that as you are of reading it.

But wait! There's more! There are more sublineages of the Omicron variant called BA.4 and BA.5. (You may recall we've known about BA.3 for quite some time, but it hasn't so far amounted to much.) There have been just a few dozen cases so far, BA.4 having turned up in South Africa, Denmark, Botswana, Scotland, and England and BA.5 in South Africa and Botswana. We don't have much information about either of these at this point; the WHO is monitoring them.

I'm not exactly sure how these subvariants all tie together; but here's my best guess: If you picture a sort of family tree (and how I wish I could embed a diagram at this point, but—sigh—Facebook), let's draw a branch labeled Omicron with five separate off-shoots labeled BA.1 through BA.5. It looks to me as though the two in New York are smaller off-shoots from BA.2 branch, so they're going to show divergence at a later point than the spot where BA.1 through BA.5 diverged. One positive sign is that all of these guys arise from further mutation of the same Omicron strain that's been circulating, which is a pattern about which we can make some predictions and against which prior immunity is likely to be somewhat protective. We could have much larger trouble when a new variant turns up as an offshoot of some lineage entirely unrelated to what's circulating as Omicron did; we were not then and are not now prepared for that, immunologically or socially.

I've read a paper available in preprint, so not yet peer-reviewed, from a team lead by a scientist from the University of Birmingham in Great Britain, regarding humoral (antibody) and cell-mediated (T cell) response to a third dose of vaccine by patients with primary and secondary antibody deficiency. Primary deficiencies are seen in people with genetic disorders characterized by the inability to produce effective antibody responses; they tend to be rare. Secondary antibody deficiencies occur when there is a decrease in either the number or the activity of antibodies produced; this often results from malignancies or the use of certain medications like the immunosuppressive drugs used to prevent rejection of a transplanted organ. We have plenty of evidence that many of these folks do not mount an effective antibody response to Covid-19 vaccination.

The study involved 454 antibody-deficient patients; some were given the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine for their first two doses, and some were given the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Third doses were with an mRNA vaccine, either from Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna. Their blood was sampled one to two months following the second dose up to four weeks prior to dose #2 and again one to two months following the third dose. Vaccinated individuals with prior SARS-CoV-2 infections were also categorized and tracked. A control group was set up with patients who have healthy immune systems and had received three doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine; they were sampled at similar intervals with respect to vaccination. Both antibody levels and T-cell responses were assessed from the samples.

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As expected, persons with antibody deficiencies showed reduced magnitude of antibody response and reduced neutralizing capacity of the antibodies that were produced when compared with the controls. The response waned after the second dose. After the third dose, the antibody-deficient patients' rate of seroprevalence (demonstrating antibodies meeting a predefined standard) rose from 61.4 percent to 76.0 percent, and there was a significant increase in the median antibody levels among the responders. The response was cross-reactive, although lower than the controls, against the Omicron variant, and the neutralizing capacity of the samples increased. We should note that even after the third dose, 32.5 percent did not demonstrate antibody but this remains a significant boost to the number responding. Although we should keep in mind that the method for T cell analysis used in this study does not broadly assess the entire T-cell response, there was also a greater percentage of individuals with a detectable T-cell response among those who received heterologous vaccination, that is, vaccination with two different vaccines for the first two and the booster doses. It is still uncertain whether an additional dose will yield further gains among those who did not respond well to the first three doses. The takeaway is that it is worth providing a third dose of vaccine to people with antibody deficiencies.

We've talked several times in the past about fluvoxamine, an FDA-approved drug used to treat obsessive-compulsive disorder and other mental illnesses; these discussions go way back to November, 2020. More recently, we reviewed progress to date in my Update #480 posted on October 28, 2021, at <https://www.facebook.com/marie.schwabmiller/posts/5246548315361532>.

Now a team led by scientists at Canada's McGill University Health Centre have done a review and meta-analysis of prior clinical trials of the drug which was published in the JAMA Network last week . They are reporting findings that fluvoxamine is likely associated with a moderately-reduced risk for hospitalization. Now this isn't some miracle cure, but given it's already in production, already established as safe, and cheap, the team stated a conclusion that the drug is a "reasonable option for high-risk outpatients" who may not be able to access other kinds of treatments. More research is needed to establish its effectiveness, but given its safety, it seems like something worth trying when there aren't better alternatives available.

I've read a profoundly depressing report in preprint (not yet peer-reviewed) from researchers at the University of Colorado Boulder, the Health Policy Center at the Urban Institute, and the Center on Society and Health at Virginia Commonwealth University. It is a comparative analysis of life expectancy changes in the US and 19 peer countries between 2019 and 2021. The peer countries are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, England and Wales, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.

Before we talk about these findings, understand the US has been lagging peer nations in life expectancy for years. An analysis done by researchers at Imperial College London and WHO back in 2017 and published in The Lancet found we were losing ground to our peers then and had actually experienced a decline in life expectancy in 2015 to 78.8 years. While historically life expectancy rises due to lowered infant mortality and scientific advances in medical care, the US had clearly had some setbacks before the pandemic. The reasons we were falling behind were cited: lack of access to health care, lack of a robust social safety net, high obesity, and high homicide rates. That study's authors wrote, "The USA has the highest child and maternal mortality, homicide rate, and body-mass index of any high-income country, and was the first of high-income countries to experience a halt or possibly reversal of increase in height in adulthood, which is associated with higher longevity," also mentioning the large share of unmet health-care needs due to high cost and social/economic inequality. Although they didn't know the pandemic was coming and allowed as how "unexpected events and changes" could interfere with their projections, they projected that we would continue to fall further behind as time went on. Even with an

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“unexpected event,” they weren’t wrong. Read on.

This new study I read over the weekend makes this clear. Here are the numbers: In 2019, the US life expectancy was 78.86, right about where it was in 2015 after a decline that year, so we hadn’t gained much in two years. In 2020, life expectancy in the US dropped by a historic 1.87 years to 76.99, much of that decline due to disproportionate losses among people of color during the first year of the pandemic. This is more than in any peer country where the changes ranged from a gain (believe it or not—Denmark, Finland, Norway, and South Korea also had increases) of 0.71 years in New Zealand to the largest loss of 1.28 which was seen in England and Wales. We’re so far out of the range of these countries, it’s difficult to take in—far above the highest among them; the average among peer countries was 0.57 years lost.

We’ll note here that the 2020 losses among people of color in the US were mind-boggling. For context, the largest overall decline in history was in 1943 at the peak of World War II when life expectancy declined by 2.9 years. By comparison, 2020’s loss among Black Americans was 3.22 years and among Hispanic Americans was 3.7 years. There were insufficient data available at this point for smaller demographic groups, so they were not reported separately. The reasons for the huge losses in these racial/ethnic groups are the reasons around health care access and inequity mentioned in the study above complicated by employment and social conditions that promoted exposure and transmission of Covid-19 in these groups.

The figures for 2021 are still estimates, although they are based on a previously validated modeling procedure. What we see here is most countries recovering a good share of what was lost in 2020; among peer nations, only Germany, Israel, and New Zealand posted losses in life expectancy ranging from 0.1 years for Germany to 0.37 years for New Zealand, which after a large gain in life expectancy in 2020, finally experienced some pandemic losses. The others all had gains, Belgium by as much as 0.99 years. The peer-nation average came out to a gain of 0.28 which replaces a good share of the 0.57 lost the year before.

The US? Further loss: 0.39 years, almost entirely among White people, more men than women, with the remaining loss likely to be in Native Americans and Alaska Natives. Hispanic life expectancy was flat, and Black people showed a moderate gain. Not so much for White people who suffered a continuation of the trend from the prior year. So we have two issues here: (1) continuing decline in life expectancy overall and (2) the reversal of the trend for greater losses among people of color compared with Whites.

To explain the first, there are the reasons which have been operating all along: our “health disadvantage,” as public health experts put it—access and cost, the drug overdose crisis, financial insecurity, rising inequality, obesity, pollution. But even if those things continued to operate, pandemic deaths decreased; so we should have still shown a rebound. We did not. The reason is a simple one: There was not much decrease in pandemic deaths among White people despite the advent of vaccination, better understanding of effective public health measures, and better treatment.

Which brings us to the second issue, that of disproportionate losses among Whites. We don’t have definitive information on this phenomenon yet, but one thing is clear: Highest deaths numbers come from areas with low levels of vaccination and high levels of resistance to pandemic mitigation measures—largely in states with disproportionately White populations, many of them rural. I’ve looked at maps that map by racial group, maps that map by per capita death rate, and maps that map by population density; and I have to say they look pretty much the same. Now correlation isn’t causation, but I’d be hard-pressed in a fact-based universe to make the case that these things are not related. The wide-angle takeaway from this study is that there has been a whole lot of preventable death in this country, far more than in our peer nations, and lately most of those deaths track with some demographics of interest. That’s a problem we should have some investment in addressing, but I am honestly not all that hopeful.

There's an existing oral drug, currently used in treating some cancers, which appears to have in vitro (laboratory) efficacy against the Omicron variant. The maker, RedHill Biopharma, announced results from laboratory study on Monday which indicate opaganib may show antiviral and anti-inflammatory activity that is independent of the spike (S) protein, so should be unaffected by spike mutations. Phase 2/3 clinical trials are finding reduced time to viral RNA clearance, 34 percent reduction in time to recovery, and 70 percent reduction in mortality in patients with moderate to severe disease. Additionally, it appears this drug may decrease renal and lung damage from infection. There's a ways to go before the FDA gets a shot at it, but so far, so good.

And that's a wrap for today. Keep yourself safe, and I'll be back in a few days.

Senior Legion Coach Wanted



Groton Legion Post #39 is seeking qualified applicants for Head Coach for the Groton Legion Post #39 Senior Baseball Team. The applicant must have previous coaching experience. The application period will close on April 29, 2022.

Applications can be picked up at Groton City Hall and mailed to:

**Doug Hamilton
411 N. 4th St.
Groton, SD 57445**

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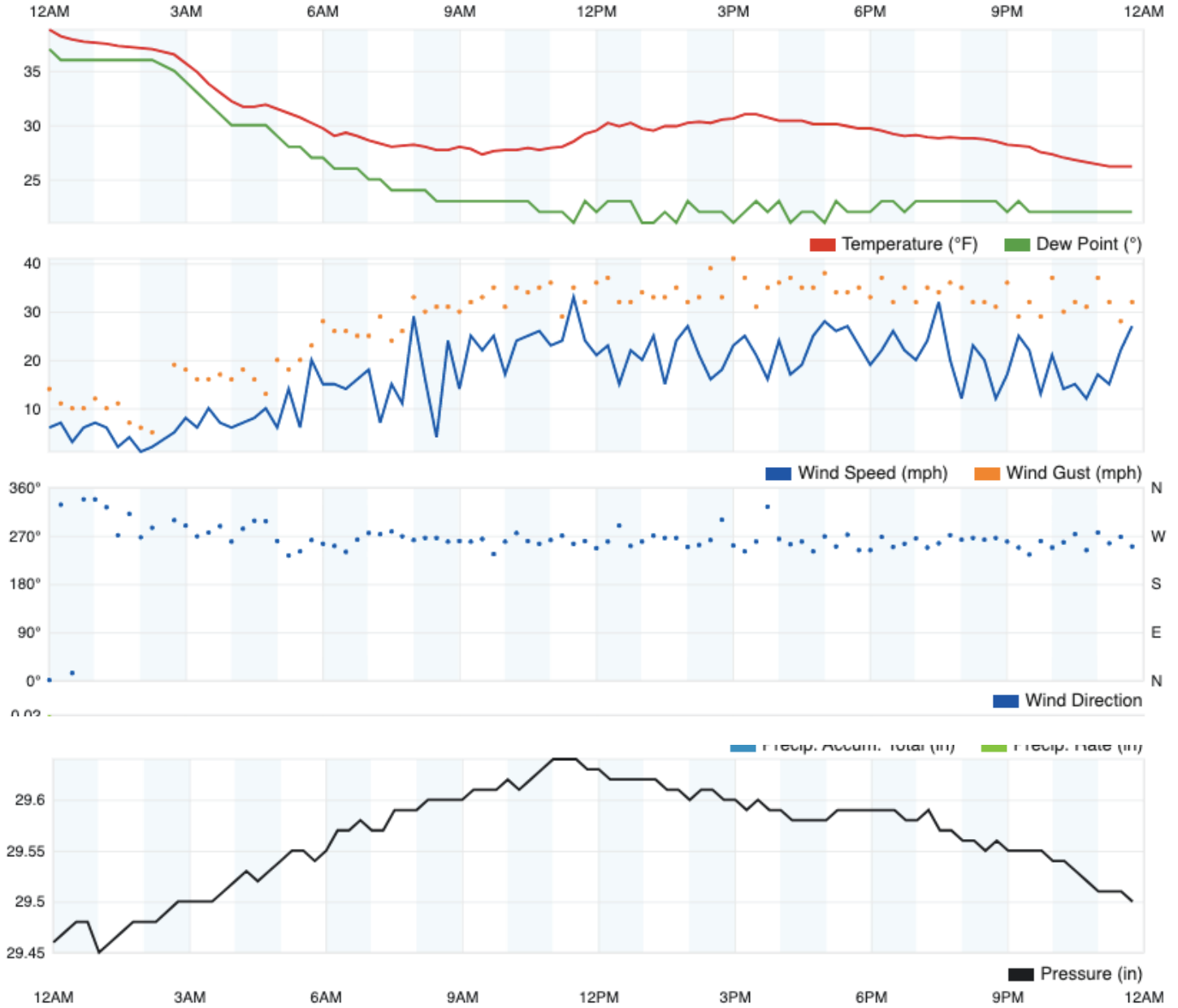


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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs




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Wind Warning

Thursday



30%

Chance Snow and Very Windy then Cloudy and Windy

High: 34 °F

Thursday Night



Mostly Cloudy and Blustery

Low: 19 °F

Friday



Mostly Sunny and Breezy

High: 32 °F

Friday Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 18 °F

Saturday



Sunny

High: 39 °F



Wind Timing & Intensity

April 14, 2022
3:41 AM

Maximum Wind Gust Forecast

	4/14 Thu													4/15 Fri																									
	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm	12am	1am	2am	3am	4am	5am	6am	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm
Aberdeen	52	51	51	49	49	48	47	45	43	41	39	37	36	35	33	32	31	30	29	28	26	25	24	24	24	25	26	28	29	29	29	28	28	26	25	24	24	23	23
Britton	44	44	45	45	45	45	44	43	41	40	38	37	36	35	35	33	33	32	31	30	30	29	28	28	28	28	29	29	30	30	30	29	29	28	28	26	25	25	24
Eagle Butte	52	51	49	48	47	46	45	44	41	40	38	37	36	35	33	32	31	30	29	28	26	25	25	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	25	25	25	24	23	22		
Eureka	52	52	51	49	49	48	47	46	45	44	41	40	39	38	37	36	35	33	32	31	29	28	26	26	26	26	26	26	28	28	28	28	28	26	26	26	24	22	21
Gettysburg	55	54	54	53	53	52	51	49	47	45	44	41	39	38	36	35	32	31	30	29	28	28	26	26	26	26	26	28	28	28	28	28	26	26	26	25	24	23	
Kennebec	51	49	49	48	48	47	46	45	44	41	40	38	36	33	31	29	26	25	24	23	22	22	22	22	22	23	23	24	24	25	25	26	26	26	26	26	23	21	20
McIntosh	54	53	53	52	51	49	48	47	46	45	43	41	40	38	37	36	33	32	31	29	28	26	25	25	25	26	28	29	29	30	30	30	30	29	29	25	22	20	
Milbank	52	52	51	51	49	49	48	46	44	41	39	37	36	33	32	32	31	30	29	28	26	26	25	25	25	26	26	28	28	28	28	26	25	24	23	22	22	22	
Miller	55	54	53	52	51	49	47	46	44	41	39	37	36	33	32	31	30	29	28	25	24	23	23	22	22	22	23	23	24	24	24	24	23	23	22	22	21	21	
Mobridge	49	48	48	47	46	45	44	43	41	40	39	38	37	36	35	32	31	30	29	26	25	24	23	23	23	23	24	25	25	26	26	26	26	26	26	24	22	20	
Murdo	52	52	51	49	49	48	47	45	43	41	39	37	35	33	32	30	29	28	26	25	24	23	22	22	22	22	23	23	24	24	24	24	24	23	23	23	22	22	
Pierre	49	49	48	47	47	46	45	44	43	40	39	37	36	33	31	30	28	26	24	23	22	20	18	18	18	20	20	21	22	23	23	24	24	25	25	23	21	20	
Redfield	53	53	52	51	51	49	48	46	44	41	39	37	36	33	32	31	30	29	28	26	25	24	23	23	24	25	26	28	28	28	26	26	25	24	23	23	22	22	
Sisseton	51	51	49	49	48	48	47	45	43	40	38	36	35	33	32	32	31	31	30	30	29	29	28	28	28	28	29	29	29	29	28	28	26	26	25	25	24	24	
Watertown	53	52	52	51	51	49	48	46	44	41	39	37	36	35	35	33	33	32	31	30	29	28	26	26	26	26	28	29	29	29	28	26	25	24	23	23	22	22	
Wheaton	41	43	43	43	44	44	43	41	39	37	36	33	32	31	30	30	29	29	28	28	26	26	26	26	26	28	28	28	28	28	26	25	24	23	22	22	23	23	

*Table values in mph
 **Created: 3 am CDT Thu 4/14/2022
 ***Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Strong winds this morning will persist for much of the day. Friday is expected to remain breezy.

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Today in Weather History

April 14, 1991: Thawing ice on top of a television tower fell onto buildings below in Garden City, Clark County. The ice had accrued during a freezing rain event on the 11th and 12th. No one was injured, but damage estimates ranged from \$35,000-\$40,000.

April 14, 2005: A dust devil developed on the west side of Bison as a dry cold front passed through the area. As it moved east across town, it blew out windows on several automobiles, damaged a 160 square foot section of roof from a house, and tore shingles off several buildings. The dust devil also pulled a flagpole out of the ground. No one was injured. The dust devil was approximately 20 feet wide, and the path length was one and a half miles.

1873 - A famous Easter blizzard raged across Kansas, Nebraska and South Dakota. Gale force winds blew the wet snow into massive drifts, however there were few deaths due to the sparse population and due to the gradual increase of the storm. (David Ludlum)

1886: The deadliest tornado in Minnesota history razed parts of St. Cloud and Sauk Rapids, leaving 72 dead and 213 injured. 11 members of a wedding party were killed including the bride and groom. The bottom of the Mississippi River was seen during the tornado's crossing. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the StarTribune.

1912: On her maiden voyage, the RMS Titanic rammed into an iceberg just before midnight. The "unsinkable ship" sank two hours and forty minutes later into the icy water of the Atlantic Ocean near Newfoundland, Canada. Tragically, 1,517 passengers including the crew were lost. A nearby ship, the Carpathia, rushed to the Titanic and was able to save 706 people.

1922: The Mississippi River reached a record height of 21.3 feet at New Orleans, Louisiana, and the river was still rising, with the crest still a week away. Understandably, the City of New Orleans was nervous as reports of levees failing upriver reached the city. A crevasse below New Orleans would relieve the pressure on the town's strained levees on the 27th, spared the city from disaster.

1935: Black Sunday refers to a particularly severe dust storm that occurred on April 14, 1935, as part of the Dust Bowl. During the afternoon, the residents of the Plains States were forced to take cover as a dust storm, or "black blizzard," blew through the region. The storm hit the Oklahoma Panhandle and Northwestern Oklahoma first and moved south for the remainder of the day. It hit Beaver around 4:00 p.m., Boise City around 5:15 p.m., and Amarillo, Texas, at 7:20 p.m. The conditions were the most severe in the Oklahoma and Texas panhandles, but the storm's effects were felt in other surrounding areas.

1987 - A storm system moving slowly northeastward across the Middle Mississippi Valley produced severe thunderstorms which spawned three tornadoes around Ottumwa IA, and produced up to four inches of rain in southeastern Nebraska, flooding rivers and streams. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A weather disturbance off the southern coast of California brought parts of southern California their first rain in six weeks. Rain-slickened roads resulted in numerous accidents in southern California, including a ten car pile-up at Riverside. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Late afternoon thunderstorms in northern Florida soaked the town of Golden Gate with 4.37 inches of rain in about two hours, resulting in local flooding. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in southeastern Texas during the mid morning hours. Thunderstorms produced dime size hail at Galveston, and wind gusts to 59 mph at Port Arthur. Afternoon thunderstorms over southeast Louisiana spawned tornadoes south of Bogalusa and at Rio. (Storm Data)

1999: In Sydney, Australia, a hailstorm causes \$1.6 billion in damage, making it the costliest hailstorm to strike a populated city in the country. The hail damaged some 22,000 homes and more than 60,000 vehicles. Also, aircraft damage at Sydney Airport was extensive.

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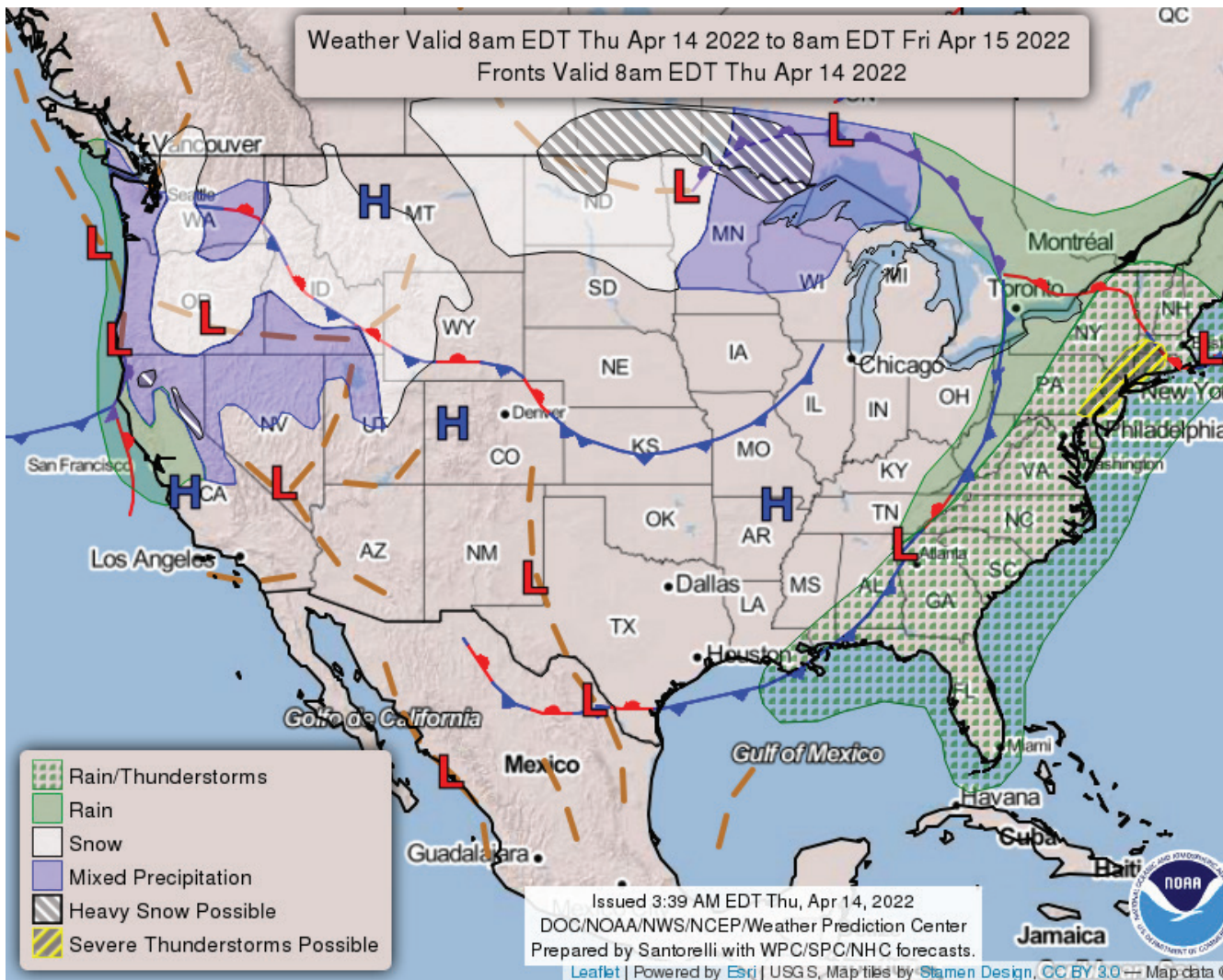
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 39 °F at 12:00 AM
Low Temp: 26 °F at 11:47 PM
Wind: 41 mph at 2:59 PM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 32 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 89 in 1908
Record Low: 9 in 1928
Average High: 57°F
Average Low: 31°F
Average Precip in April.: 0.67
Precip to date in April.: 1.79
Average Precip to date: 2.73
Precip Year to Date: 3.59
Sunset Tonight: 8:18:39 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:44:47 AM



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LOOKING FOR HOPE?

His professors and fellow students recognized him as one of the most brilliant students on campus. He had "the most" when it came to worldly goods. From any vantage point, he seemed to "have it all."

Early one morning while the campus was wrapped in silence, he jumped to his death from his room in the dorm. As his family went through the items left behind, they discovered a note that read, "There is utterly no hope!"

Hopelessness has many causes and few cures. Many, searching for some form of hope, turn to alcohol or other drugs. Others lose themselves in their work or search anxiously for a way out of their despair. Many seek relief by trying new experiences or adventures. Few, however, discover long-lasting results.

Hopelessness may come from unmet expectations, sorrow, or grief. We all seem to want a life without a "pile of problems." No one looks for tragedies as a form of entertainment. And, we rarely have an opportunity to "pick our pain." Problems and pain, sorrow and grief, are as much a part of life as sunshine or rain, night or day.

Is there a sure source where everyone can find hope? The Psalmist believes there is. "...hope in the Lord; for with the Lord, there is unfailing love. His redemption overflows."

Hoping is different from wishing. Wishing is a desire for something we don't have. Hope, on the other hand, is a gift from God and will give us confidence that He is with us and will fulfill every promise He has ever made. Hope will protect us and empower us to meet the dangers and disappointments of life.

Prayer: Lord, as long as we have You we have hope and know that Your unfailing love will guide us and guard us. You are indeed our Hope! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. Psalm 130:7

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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 Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

05-14-24-29-30

(five, fourteen, twenty-four, twenty-nine, thirty)

Estimated jackpot: \$20,000

Lotto America

10-25-32-33-52, Star Ball: 9, ASB: 3

(ten, twenty-five, thirty-two, thirty-three, fifty-two; Star Ball: nine; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$10.98 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$20 million

Powerball

14-16-41-63-68, Powerball: 26, Power Play: 2

(fourteen, sixteen, forty-one, sixty-three, sixty-eight; Powerball: twenty-six; Power Play: two)

Estimated jackpot: \$302 million

Grand jury indictment in fatal Rapid City hotel shooting

RAPID CITY, S.D. (AP) — A Pennington County grand jury has indicted a man on a second-degree murder charge stemming from a shooting at a Rapid City hotel last month.

Nineteen-year-old Myron Pourier was shot at the Grand Gateway Hotel on March 19 and died from his injuries April 3. Rapid City police responded to a report of gunfire in one of the rooms at the hotel and found an injured Pourier.

Quincy Bear Robe, also 19, was arrested the day of the shooting after investigators interviewed witnesses. He originally was charged with aggravated assault and committing a felony with a firearm.

The firearm charge still stands, but the assault charge has now been upgraded to murder. A preliminary hearing was canceled after the grand jury made an indictment.

Defense attorney John Murphy says the state likes to present cases to grand juries instead of holding preliminary hearings because "grand juries meet in secret, the rules of evidence are not well enforced, and neither the defendant nor his or her counsel can attend."

Bear Robe is currently held at the Pennington County Jail on \$1 million cash bail. He will be arraigned May 2, the Rapid City Journal reported.

The location of the crime garnered scrutiny when one of the hotel owners made comments on Facebook stating that Native Americans would be banned from the property following the shooting. Police said both the victim and the defendant are Native American.

A Rapid City Indigenous-led organization, NDN Collective, has filed a federal class action civil rights lawsuit against the hotel, its owners, and its parent company after NDN members reportedly attempted to rent rooms at the hotel and said they were denied.

South Dakota AG's impeachment trial set for June 21-22

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — The leader of the South Dakota Senate on Wednesday named a lead prosecutor for the impeachment trial of state Attorney General Jason Ravnsborg and scheduled it for late June.

The announcement from Republican Sen. Lee Schoenbeck comes one day after House lawmakers voted to impeach Ravnsborg for a car crash that killed a pedestrian.

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Ravnsborg, a Republican, is the first official to be impeached in South Dakota history and must take a leave until the Senate decides whether to remove him from office.

Schoenbeck set the trial for June 21-22. He said Pennington County prosecutor Mark Vargo will argue in favor of the two articles of impeachment — one for crimes that led to the death of Joe Boever and the other for malfeasance in office. Clay County State's Attorney Alexis Tracy will assist in the prosecution.

Ravnsborg will get the chance to present his case. He said after the impeachment vote that he believes he will be vindicated.

The attorney general was driving home from a Republican dinner in September 2020 when he struck and killed Boever, who was walking along a rural highway. Ravnsborg pleaded no contest last year to a pair of traffic misdemeanors in the crash, including making an illegal lane change. He has cast Boever's death as a tragic accident.

Schoenbeck said he expects senators to do their homework ahead of the trial.

"This isn't like a criminal trial. It's a political trial," he said. "There's no reason to have the senators sit on the floor and start reading reports. That should all be done beforehand. I believe it will be."

Vargo was part of the original team of state's attorneys that Hyde County Deputy State's Attorney Emily Sovell used in determining what criminal charges should be brought. Although he left the group before Ravnsborg was charged with three misdemeanors, Schoenbeck said Vargo has a firm grasp of the evidence.

Vargo said Schoenbeck asked him to oversee the trial.

"It's as simple as that," Vargo said. "I did not lobby for it."

The trial starts two days before the Republican convention in Watertown, where delegates will pick the party's attorney general candidate for November's general election.

Blizzard in North Dakota, tornado in SE Minnesota

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A tornado tore up a small Minnesota town and a blizzard forced the closure of the North Dakota Capitol, schools and roads, as spring storms wreaked havoc across the Upper Midwest.

The National Weather Service said the twister with winds of more than 110 mph took the roofs off houses, destroyed grain bins, snapped power lines and lifted a house off its foundation in Taopi, Minnesota late Tuesday.

Two people were pulled from the wreckage and taken to a hospital in nearby Austin with noncritical injuries after the fierce winds roared through the town of about 80 residents just after 10:30 p.m.

Mower County Sheriff Steve Sandvik said dispatchers began getting calls from residents trapped in their damaged homes not long after a tornado warning siren sounded.

The severe weather also caused damage in Spring Valley in Fillmore County and other parts of southeastern Minnesota, the National Weather Service in La Crosse, Wisconsin said.

The North Dakota Capitol in Bismarck, along with scores of schools, government offices and roads, remained closed Wednesday as a blizzard continued to bear down on the state.

A blizzard warning remained in effect through Thursday. Up to 2 feet (60 centimeters) of snow was forecast for western and central North Dakota. The blizzard warning extended into eastern Montana and the northwestern corner of South Dakota.

"This is nutso," Karley Gosch said as she braved the strong winds and pelting snow in Mandan, North Dakota.

Interstate 94 from the Montana border to Bismarck remained closed because of treacherous conditions.

Bismarck and Mandan public schools were closed Wednesday, along with numerous colleges and universities.

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Black Hills Pioneer. April 9, 2022.

Editorial: Ravnsborg no longer holds the trust of South Dakotans, it is time to impeach him

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Tuesday, members of South Dakota's House of Representatives are anticipated to vote whether to impeach Attorney General Jason Ravensborg, perhaps ending the saga of his Sept. 12, 2020, crash that claimed the life of Joe Boever as he walked along Highway 14 near Highmore late at night.

On March 28, by a 6-2 vote, along party lines, the select committee chose to not recommend impeachment.

We strongly disagree and call for state representatives to impeach Ravensborg. And to Ravensborg himself, we call on you once again, as we did in our Editorial on Sept. 4, 2021, to resign. You no longer instill the confidence of South Dakotans or the personal integrity to hold the office of the top law enforcement officer in the state.

In the 21-page majority report, Republicans of the select committee repeatedly cite a clause in the state constitution that says officials can be impeached for actions "in office" and then argue most of Ravensborg's actions surrounding the crash were not done in his official capacity as attorney general or were not done with "an evil or corrupt motive."

This is what state law says:

"The Governor and other state and judicial officers, except county judges, justices of the peace and police magistrates, shall be liable to impeachment for drunkenness, crimes, corrupt conduct, or malfeasance or misdemeanor in office, but judgment in such cases shall not extend further than to removal from office and disqualification to hold any office of trust or profit under the state. The person accused whether convicted or acquitted shall nevertheless be liable to indictment, trial, judgment and punishment according to law."

The majority says his crimes, for which he was convicted, were not conducted while in office. Rather, he was returning from a Lincoln Day dinner in Redfield.

We disagree. When a person is elected to office, they are, from that point forth, until they leave office, "in office" 24/7. They represent South Dakota and the people who elected them. Public officials should be, and are held to a higher standard than your average citizen.

Even Ravensborg said that when you are the AG, you're "always runnin'."

During his interview with the North Dakota investigators, Ravensborg recalled his conversation with Sheriff Mike Volek where he explained that he was returning home from a Lincoln Day Dinner when the accident occurred.

"He goes, 'well you're not running this year are ya, already?' and I says, 'no, but you're Attorney General, you're always runnin' you're always out seein' the people and I think that's what you gotta do and get out and find out what their concerns are and talk with them,'" Ravensborg said. "That's what you should do as an elected person."

Ravnsborg has been pulled over by law enforcement more than 25 times, crash investigators found. Eight of those traffic violations have been since he was elected South Dakota attorney general. And guess what, in five of those traffic stops, he identified himself as the attorney general or displayed his badge to the law enforcement officer.

Now it is no secret that law enforcement officers often give fellow cops, firefighters, ambulance crew members, and judges the professional courtesy of a verbal warning during minor violations of the law such as a speeding infraction. It is that officer's prerogative to cite, issue a written warning, or a verbal warning. And they do that with the general public as well. That doesn't mean they won't place cuffs on a fellow officer as it is well documented that they do.

So was Ravensborg trying to get that professional courtesy when he displayed his badge or identified himself as the AG?

In most of his traffic stops he was issued a verbal or written warning. However, he has been cited numerous times for speeding both in South Dakota and Iowa.

Four days before his trial, he was cited for going 57 mph in a 35 mph zone.

In September 1996 he was cited for going 6-10 mph over the posted speed limit.

In September 2003 he was cited for going 11-15 mph over the posted speed limit.

In January 2014 he was cited for going 54 in a 45.

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In March 2014 he was cited for going 40 in a 30.

In March 2015 he was cited for going 1-5 mph over the posted speed limit.

In May 2015 he was cited for going 85 in a 65.

In May 2017 he was cited for going 75 in a 70.

In April 2018 he was cited for going 80 in a 65.

In August 2018 he was cited for going 40 in a 35.

According to crash investigators, Ravensborg's entire vehicle was on the shoulder of the road at the time of the crash. It also took him 614 feet to stop from the time of impact. Normally it would take, "less than 200."

So we are left now with more questions than we had following the tragic accident.

Why was Ravensborg completely on the shoulder that was equipped with rumble strips?

Is it plausible that he did not see Boever at the time of the crash? After all, his head went through the windshield and his blood and glasses were found inside Ravensborg's car.

Did Ravensborg really not see Boever lying dead alongside the road as he walked back to the "Highmore" sign to double check which town he was near? Remember, Boever was carrying a flashlight that was still lit the following morning and was inches from the road. Subsequent tests of the flashlight at night in the crash location, found that it was "shining like a beacon."

Volek, who in the meantime died on Nov. 1, 2021, did a subpar job in his investigation the night of the crash. Numerous law enforcement officers who've conducted countless deer/auto crash investigations said the first thing you do as a cop when told an animal has been struck is look at the damage. Is there hair stuck on the car? Is there feces on the vehicle? If not, something is not right, they have likely struck something other than an animal. Then, you look for the injured animal. You don't want it suffering, and you don't want it to create another crash by running back into the roadway. Volek even told investigators that he saw Boever's light shining, but thought it was a part of Ravensborg's car and did not investigate it.

So did Ravensborg know he hit a person, and, after the sheriff botched the investigation, thought he was going to get away with it? Did his conscience then get the better of him by the next day?

Ravnsborg, in his interview with North Dakota investigators, said he saw Boever's body when he was walking along the road to read the sign verifying that it was Highmore he was near, but he quickly changed his story. Did he really see Boever, or did he misspeak? Investigators said that he would have had to pass right by Boever, laying right along side the road.

How were the select committee members chosen, and are any of the members Ravensborg's friends?

Why did the committee meet almost entirely in executive session, secluded away from the public and even the general legislators?

The full report was released on March 30. Is two weeks enough time for House members to review it and make an informed decision on whether to impeach?

Almost 40 legislators listened to two Highway Patrol troopers outline the crash investigation Wednesday. There are 70 members of the South Dakota House of Representatives, so what about those other 30 members? Have their minds already been made up?

Why did the select committee decline to hear the same report? Instead they were only allowed to ask questions of the troopers.

Did Gov. Kristi Noem "taint" the House members when she issued information released about the crash, even before Ravensborg's court hearing? Those reports included video interviews with Ravensborg, crash scene diagrams, and more.

Does the Republican leadership not want to impeach Ravensborg because if they do, Noem is the one who will appoint a new AG? Ravensborg is currently investigating whether Noem broke ethics rules over her use of the state airplanes as well as her handling her daughter's certification as a real estate appraiser. Is this what's concerning the leadership regarding a replacement appointment by the governor?

The questions go on. And on.

Now, we do not believe that Ravensborg should be impeached simply because of the crash. Accidents

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can and do happen. Nor do we believe he was intoxicated at the time. But no other tests were conducted for other substances in his system until the day after the fatal crash.

We also do not believe he is being truthful with investigators.

He twice pulled out in front of law enforcement officers forcing them to hit their brakes to avoid striking him.

Yes, he stopped and called 911.

Yes, he was cooperative with the sheriff on the scene and did not leave until he was released.

Yes, he turned over his car and cell phones to investigators and sat for interviews with them.

Yes, he was within his rights to not appear in court for the misdemeanor charges he was convicted of and therefore not face the family.

The South Dakota Sheriff's Association has called for his resignation.

The South Dakota Police Chiefs Association has called for his resignation.

The South Dakota Fraternal Order of Police has called for his resignation.

When these top law enforcement organizations call for his resignation, it is clear that they no longer hold confidence in him, and the legislature should listen and act accordingly.

To read the minutes and to listen to the audio from the select committee hearings, visit, tinyurl.com/AGsesh0409

To read the committee's report and the full investigation packet, visit, tinyurl.com/AGtree0409.

Yankton Press & Dakotan. April 11, 2022.

Editorial: CRT Executive Order: A Broader Fallout?

Last week, South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem signed an executive order restricting the teaching of "inherently divisive concepts" in grades K-12 throughout the state. In so doing, she became the latest Republican governor to target the teaching of critical race theory (CRT) in the state.

This order should be easy to enact in South Dakota since CRT is reportedly not used anywhere in the state at any level.

But that's not the big concern here.

Instead, the worry is that the ban of this concept will be blurred into something more, all for the sake of political gain.

It's safe to say that, up until about two years ago, very few people were even aware of the concept of critical race theory. CRT is defined by the Education Week website this way: "The core idea is that race is a social construct, and that racism is not merely the product of individual bias or prejudice, but also something embedded in legal systems and policies." It is a theoretical view developed more than 40 years ago, but it's not exactly a mainstream educational concept: One South Dakota educational official admitted to having to search for CRT online when hearing about efforts to ban it.

But attacking CRT has become a trend the last couple of years. The fact that GOP lawmakers suddenly began loudly opposing it at about the same time suggests the outrage was calculated for political leverage.

There is some disagreement among liberals and conservatives about what exactly CRT encompassed, Education Week reported, and that's the real minefield we face.

In her executive order (which closely mirrored a bill rejected by lawmakers during the recent legislative session), Noem put it this way, "Our children will not be taught that they are racists or that they are victims, and they will not be compelled to feel responsible for the mistakes of their ancestors. We will guarantee that our students learn America's true and honest history — that includes both our triumphs and our mistakes."

But that vaguely worded statement, particularly the last sentence, is somewhat contradictory.

If learning about "true and honest" history means learning about "our mistakes and our triumphs," then learning about this nation's racial history must be part of that curriculum. And that would include learning not only about slavery and the Civil War, but also about what created the situation — including the "Three-Fifths Clause," which counted slaves as three-fifths of a person for census purposes, that was drafted into

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the U.S. Constitution. It must also include what happened post-Civil War, such as the Black codes and Jim Crow laws that haunted Blacks in the south for a century.

In South Dakota, that also includes dealing with Native American relations, including the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre, which for a century was treated as a "battle," and the roots of the reservation system that still prevails now.

The danger is that such topics might be challenged by some who misconstrue and/or distort anti-CRT legislation into something that people don't want to hear about in the classroom. Last year, Education Week reported that the conservative Heritage Foundation placed a wide variety of issues under the CRT umbrella, including Black Lives Matter protests, diversity training, LGBTQ clubs on school campuses and more.

What must be remembered throughout all this is right in the executive order: that some of our greatest social triumphs as a nation have been derived by learning from our mistakes.

By its nebulous nature, the executive order may allow some of us to overlook or avoid that fact. And that's the real risk in this issue.

END

Thinking small: Biden scrounges for ways to break through

By CHRIS MEGERIAN and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With his sweeping domestic agenda on hold and images of horror in Ukraine dominating headlines, President Joe Biden is scrounging for ways to demonstrate that he's still making progress for Americans at a time when many feel the country is heading in the wrong direction.

Six months out from the midterm elections, Biden's team is betting that smaller, discrete announcements can break through to voters better than talk of transformational plans that are so far only aspirational. And as the global focus is on Ukraine, the White House is eager for Americans to see Biden tackling the kitchen table issues important to them — none more so than the searing inflation exacerbated by the Russian invasion.

Last week, that meant aides positioned big rigs outside the White House so Biden could talk about efforts to get more truck drivers on the road. A day later, he welcomed back former President Barack Obama for the signing of an executive order updating the Affordable Care Act. And after that, he signed bipartisan legislation intended to safeguard the U.S. Postal Service's financial future.

This week, he's notching his heaviest domestic travel in months. On Thursday, he is to visit Greensboro, North Carolina, to highlight his plans to boost domestic supply chains and high-tech workforces. It comes after a Tuesday stop in Iowa to announce that his administration was granting a waiver to allow more ethanol in gasoline year-round, a move that officials estimated would shave 10 cents per gallon off gasoline prices — but at just 2,300 gas stations out of the nation's more than 100,000.

The White House says the public focus on the war in Ukraine is "understandable" and it's realistic about the challenges facing Biden in breaking through.

"While the world needs to understand and see how he is leading on the war, the country needs to see how he is continuing to lead on the economy," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Wednesday. "Being able to continue to speak to our domestic audience about that is a huge priority. And his schedule tells the story of how much of a priority it is."

All of the policies Biden is touting will have direct impact on American lives — but they also fall far short of the goals that Biden set for himself when taking office. Taken together, they show how the White House is trying to regain momentum at a time when Biden is under pressure to recalibrate his ambitions.

"I think it makes good strategic sense that, if you're going to be stymied by Congress, you take matters into your own hands," said Eric Schultz, a communications official in the Obama White House.

It's a dynamic that Obama himself confronted, particularly in his second term in office, when he used his executive authority to push forward his agenda as much as possible.

"It's not a coincidence that this strategy emerged when Republicans threw up their hands and decided

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they didn't want to be governing partners," Schultz said.

Schultz said Democrats need to demonstrate they're making progress even if they're not passing the sweeping legislation they promised.

"Did we accomplish everything we wanted to? No," he said. "But did we roll up our sleeves every day and push the needle forward? Yes."

While there have been successes, notably the confirmation of Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to be the first Black woman on the Supreme Court, much of Biden's agenda remains stalemated — or worse.

Lawmakers are struggling to hash out a bipartisan compromise on legislation that's intended to help the U.S. compete economically with China. Biden's sweeping Build Back Better legislation is dead in the water, waiting for Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin to decide what, if anything, he'll support. Immigration reform, gun control legislation and voting reform have fallen out of the national conversation.

That's left Biden touting the benefits of infrastructure legislation that passed last year — old bridges slated for replacement are a staple of his domestic travels — and looking for other, small policies that can be advanced.

Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, said smaller initiatives are only going to help if they "lay the groundwork for passing much bigger policies."

"Singles are fine if they're a prelude to a grand slam," he said, adding that Democrats face "a motivation challenge" ahead of the midterms. "Democrats are not going to get people to the polls with a lot of singles."

William Galston, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, said Biden is trying to make the most of a difficult situation.

"He's doing what he can now that some of his grander plans have been sidetracked," he said.

Galston recalled a similar strategy when he worked on domestic policy for President Bill Clinton. Before the midterms in 1994, the White House worked on "running up the score" with policy proposals that were less controversial.

"It was just what happened when the White House conceded defeat on its central agenda item," which was health care reform for Clinton.

"Those smaller victories made absolutely no difference in the midterms. The fact that they were below the radar screen was good news for passing legislation, but bad news for their political effectiveness," he said. For Biden, "that's likely to be the case this time, too."

Pope marks Holy Thursday ahead of prison foot-washing ritual

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis has celebrated Mass in St. Peter's Basilica to mark Holy Thursday, hours before he was expected at an Italian prison to perform a foot-washing ritual for a dozen inmates in a gesture of humility.

Attending the Mass were some 1,800 priests. Francis in his homily advised priests not to focus on worldly concerns such as power, planning and bureaucracy. He exhorted them to "serve, with a clear conscience, the holy and faithful people of God."

Francis made no reference to decades of scandals involving priests who sexually abused children and were often transferred from parish to parish by bishops who tried to avoid embarrassment rather than protect minors.

In the afternoon, Francis is expected at a prison in Civitavecchia, a port town 80 kilometers (50 miles) northwest of Rome, for the foot-washing ceremony which recalls Jesus' gesture of humility for his apostles.

Francis has made paying attention to those on society's margins — including refugees, migrants and people in prisons — a hallmark of his papacy. On Holy Thursday in past years, he has gone to prisons in or near Rome.

Holy Week, which draws hundreds of thousands of faithful to the Vatican, began with Palm Sunday Mass on April 10 in St. Peter's Square.

This year, the Good Friday torch-lit Way of the Cross procession returns to its traditional venue at the

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ancient Colosseum after a two-year absence due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Vatican has invited a Russian woman and a Ukrainian woman, who work together at a Rome hospital, to carry a cross together during the procession. That has angered some Ukrainians, including Ukraine's ambassador to the Holy See and the archbishop of Kyiv. Their objections center on whether such a gesture, implying reconciliation, is suitable, given Russia's invasion of its neighbor Ukraine and ongoing war against the country's people.

The Vatican is still going ahead with the procession's lineup of participants, who take turns carrying a lightweight cross during the procession, which is presided over by the pontiff and recalls Jesus' death by crucifixion.

Holy Week culminates on Easter Sunday, two days later.

Administration unveils steps to boost racial equity in govt

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

The Justice Department is improving language access to its programs to help people with limited English proficiency better report crimes. The Interior Department is providing technical assistance to Native American tribes to help them apply for grants. The Energy Department is helping low-income households access programs to weatherize their homes and save energy.

Those efforts are among hundreds of strategies and commitments the Biden administration was announcing Thursday. They are the product of an executive order that President Joe Biden signed hours after taking office with the goal of advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities across the federal government.

The order was the first of its kind by a president, said Chiraag Bains, deputy assistant to the president for racial justice and equity.

"We set the mission and the mandate for every agency, the entire federal government, to center equity in all that we do," Bains told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

After more than a year of review, more than 90 federal agencies, including all major Cabinet departments, were releasing their "equity action plans" on Thursday.

The plans outline more than 300 strategies and commitments that aim to make federal policies fairer for everyone, including poorer communities and communities of color; tribal, rural and LGBTQ communities; and people with disabilities and women and girls.

They were to be discussed at a White House event hosted Thursday by domestic policy adviser Susan Rice, budget director Shalanda Young and members of the Cabinet. Biden, a Democrat, has one of the most diverse Cabinets, with Black and Hispanic people leading major departments, including Defense, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Some of the equity plans have been announced, such as work by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to close the racial gap in homeownership, address disproportionate rates of homelessness among underserved communities and reduce bias in home appraisals.

Others strategies are being made public for the first time, such as Defense Department efforts to promote the use of artificial intelligence technology to reduce algorithmic bias by investing in the development of a more diverse AI workforce. That work includes partnerships with historically Black colleges and universities.

Equity action teams at every agency led the reviews. Bains said that, taken together, the strategies "will advance equity and justice so that everybody can thrive in America."

Ukraine says it damaged Russian flagship, crew evacuates

By ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian forces said they struck and seriously damaged the flagship of Russia's Black Sea fleet, dealing a potentially major setback to Moscow's forces as they try to regroup for a renewed offensive in eastern Ukraine after retreating from much of the north, including the capital.

Russia said Thursday the entire crew of the Moskva, a warship that would typically have 500 sailors on

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board, was forced to evacuate after a fire overnight and also reported it was badly damaged. It did not acknowledge any attack, which would also deal a major blow to Russian prestige seven weeks into a war that is already widely seen as a historic blunder.

The reported ship attack came hours after Ukraine's allies sought to rally new support for the embattled country. On a visit with leaders from three other countries on Russia's doorstep who fear they could next be in Moscow's sights, Lithuania's President Gitanas Nausėda declared that "the fight for Europe's future is happening here."

Meanwhile, U.S. President Joe Biden, who called Russia's actions in Ukraine "a genocide" this week, approved \$800 million in new military assistance to Kyiv. He said weapons from the West have sustained Ukraine's fight so far and "we cannot rest now."

The news of the flagship's damage overshadowed Russian claims of advances in the southern port city of Mariupol, where they have been battling the Ukrainians since the early days of the invasion in some of the heaviest fighting of the war — at a horrific cost to civilians.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj.-Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Wednesday that 1,026 troops from the Ukrainian 36th Marine Brigade surrendered at a metals factory in the city. But Vadym Denysenko, adviser to Ukraine's interior minister, rejected the claim, telling Current Time TV that "the battle over the seaport is still ongoing today."

It was unclear when a surrender may have occurred or how many forces were still defending Mariupol.

Russian state television broadcast footage Wednesday that it said was from Mariupol showing dozens of men in camouflage walking with their hands up and carrying others on stretchers or in chair holds. One man held a white flag.

Mariupol's capture is critical for Russia because it would put a swath of territory in its control that would allow its forces in the south, who came up through the annexed Crimean Peninsula, to link up with troops in the eastern Donbas region, Ukraine's industrial heartland and the target of the coming offensive.

Moscow-backed separatists have been battling Ukraine in the Donbas since 2014, the same year Russia seized Crimea. Russia has recognized the independence of the rebel regions in the Donbas.

But the loss of the Moskva, which satellite images show was at the port of Sevastopol in Crimea a week ago, could set those efforts back.

The governor of the Odesa region, Maksym Marchenko, said the Ukrainians struck the guided-missile cruiser with two Neptune missiles and caused "serious damage." Russia's Defense Ministry said ammunition on board detonated as a result of a fire.

It was not clear if the ship was totally disabled, but even serious damage could be a major blow to Russia, which already saw its tank carrier Orsk hit late last month.

Hours after the attack was reported, Ukrainian authorities said on the Telegram messaging service that explosions had struck Odesa, Ukraine's largest port which lies on the Black Sea, as does Sevastopol. They urged residents to remain calm and said there is no danger to civilians.

Russia invaded on Feb. 24 with the goal, according to Western officials, of rapidly seizing Kyiv, toppling the government and installing a Moscow-friendly replacement. But the ground advance stalled in the face of strong Ukrainian resistance with the help of Western arms, and Russia has lost potentially thousands of fighters. The conflict has killed untold numbers of Ukrainian civilians and forced millions more to flee.

A U.N. task force warned that the war threatens to devastate the economies of many developing countries that are facing even higher food and energy costs and increasingly difficult financial conditions. U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the war is "supercharging" a crisis in food, energy and finance in poorer countries that were already struggling to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and a lack of access to funding.

The war has also unsettled the post-Cold War balance in Europe — and particularly worried countries on NATO's eastern flank that fear they could next come under attack. As a result, those nations have been some of Ukraine's staunchest supporters.

The presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia traveled Wednesday to war-ravaged areas in

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Ukraine and demanded accountability for what they called war crimes. They met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and visited Borodyanka, one of the towns near Kyiv where evidence of atrocities was found after Russian troops withdrew to focus on the country's east.

"There are no doubts that they committed war crimes. And for that, they should be accountable," Latvian President Egils Levits said.

Nauseda of Lithuania called for tougher sanctions, including against Russian oil and gas shipments and all the country's banks.

In his nightly address, Zelenskyy noted that the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court visited the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, which was controlled by Russian forces until recently and where evidence of mass killings and more than 400 bodies were found.

"It is inevitable that the Russian troops will be held responsible. We will drag everyone to a tribunal, and not only for what was done in Bucha," Zelenskyy said late Wednesday.

He also said work was continuing to clear tens of thousands of unexploded shells, mines and trip wires left in northern Ukraine by the departing Russians. He urged people returning to homes to be wary of any unfamiliar objects and report them to police.

Sri Lankan protesters mark new year near president's office

By KRISHAN FRANCIS Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lankans shared milk rice and oil cakes to celebrate their traditional new year on Thursday opposite President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office, where they camped out for a sixth day demanding his resignation over the worst economic crisis in memory.

Soldiers who were disabled in the island nation's civil war lit a hearth, Buddhist monks chanted religious verses and others set off firecrackers amid chants of: "Victory to the people's struggle!"

Protesters are occupying the entrance and surroundings of Rajapaksa's office, holding him responsible for the economic situation. They also are calling for his powerful family to leave power, accusing them of corruption and misrule.

"Other days our children go to their grandparents to celebrate the new year, but today we brought them here to show them the real situation in the country," said Dilani Niranjala, who attended the protest with her husband and two sons aged 10 and 8.

"We don't want to lie to them about what's going on in the country and go to our village to celebrate the new year. From their younger days, they should see the truth and live with the truth," she added.

Niranjala's husband, Usitha Gamage, who works as a taxi driver, said he had been discouraged watching the news every morning about skyrocketing living costs.

"I am so happy that this struggle is taking place and it gives me new hope and energy," he said.

"The new year — after we chase them out — is going to be great for us. This is what I have told my children," he added.

Sri Lankans in recent months have endured fuel and food shortages and daily power outages. Most of those items are paid for in hard currency, but Sri Lanka is on the brink of bankruptcy, saddled with dwindling foreign reserves and \$25 billion in foreign debt due for repayment over the next five years. Nearly \$7 billion is due this year.

They have been forced to wait in long lines to buy cooking gas, fuel and milk powder, and doctors have warned there is a potentially catastrophic shortage of essential medicines in government hospitals.

Tharushi Nirmani, a 23-year-old student who was helping distribute food to protesters, said the movement was uniting Sri Lankans from different backgrounds.

"All these years, the new year was celebrated by only two ethnic groups — Sinhalese and Tamils — but most of the people who were with us last night were Muslims," she said, referring to her fellow volunteers. "There is an amazing togetherness."

The government announced Tuesday that it is suspending repayments of foreign debt, including bonds and government-to-government borrowing, pending the completion of a loan restructuring program with

the International Monetary Fund.

The government says the World Bank has provided \$10 million to buy essential medicine and equipment and the health ministry is in discussions with the World Health Organization and Asian Development Bank for additional funding. The government has also appealed to Sri Lankans living and working overseas to donate medicines or money to purchase them.

The World Bank said Wednesday that it is concerned about the uncertain economic outlook in Sri Lanka and is working to provide emergency support for poor and vulnerable households to help them weather the economic crisis.

Much of the anger expressed in weeks of protests has been directed at the Rajapaksa family, which has held power for most of the past two decades. Critics accuse the family of having the government borrow heavily to finance projects that have earned no money, such as a port facility built with Chinese loans.

The president and his older brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, continue to hold power, despite their politically powerful family being the focus of public ire. The Rajapaksas have refused to resign but the crisis and ongoing protests have prompted many Cabinet members to quit. Four ministers were sworn in as caretakers, but many key government portfolios are vacant.

Parliament has failed to reach a consensus on how to deal with the crisis after nearly 40 governing coalition lawmakers said they would no longer vote according to coalition instructions, significantly weakening the government.

But with opposition parties divided, they have been incapable of forming a majority to take control of Parliament.

In Gaza, an application languishes, and a toddler dies

By JOSEPH KRAUSS and FARES AKRAM Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Jalal al-Masri and his wife spent eight years and their life savings on fertility treatments in order to have their daughter, Fatma. When she was diagnosed with a congenital heart defect in December, they waited another three months for an Israeli permit to take her for treatment outside the Gaza Strip.

The permit never came. The 19-month-old died on March 25.

"When I lost my daughter, I felt there is no more life in Gaza," al-Masri said, his voice trembling. "The story of my daughter will happen again and again."

Israel grants permits for what it defines as life-saving treatment to Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, which has been under a crippling Israeli-Egyptian blockade since the Islamic militant group Hamas seized power there in 2007.

But families must negotiate an opaque and uncertain bureaucratic process. Applications are submitted through the Palestinian Authority, reports must be stamped, paperwork processed. In the end, all the al-Masris got was a text message from the Israeli military saying the application is "being examined."

COGAT, the Israeli military body that oversees the permit system, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Of the more than 15,000 patient permit applications from Gaza in 2021, 37% were delayed or denied, according to figures from the World Health Organization.

Al-Mezan, a Gaza-based rights group that has helped the al-Masris and other families, says at least 71 Palestinians, including 25 women and nine children, have died since 2011 after their applications were denied or delayed.

That doesn't necessarily mean that Israel's decisions were responsible for the deaths — even the best hospitals can't save everyone. But the families of the sick faced the added stress of negotiating a complex bureaucracy — and the uncertainty over whether things might have turned out differently.

In December, doctors in the town of Khan Younis diagnosed Fatma with an atrial septal defect, a hole in her tiny heart. Gaza's health care system has been battered by the 15-year blockade and four wars between Israel and Hamas. So they referred her for treatment at a Palestinian-run hospital in Israeli-annexed east

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Jerusalem that offers pediatric cardiac surgery.

Her father took the medical report and raced off to a small office in Gaza City run by the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority. Hamas drove the PA out of Gaza in 2007, confining its authority to parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, but it continues to serve as a liaison between Gazans and Israeli authorities.

A few days later, al-Masri was informed that the application had been approved. The PA booked an appointment at Makassed Hospital in east Jerusalem on Dec. 28 and agreed to pay for the treatment. The toddler's grandmother would accompany her.

All they needed was a security permit from Israel.

Israel captured Gaza, along with the West Bank and east Jerusalem, in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians want all three territories to form their future state. Israel withdrew troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005, but it still heavily restricts the movement of people and goods in and out of the narrow coastal strip.

Israel says the blockade is needed to contain Hamas, which Western countries view as a terrorist group because of its long history of carrying out deadly attacks against Israelis. Critics see the blockade as a form of collective punishment for Gaza's 2 million Palestinian residents.

Israel denies permits to Palestinians whom it sees as a security threat. But in the case of the 19-month-old Fatma and her grandmother, it just said the application was under consideration.

The hospital kept the appointment open until Jan. 6. Then Jalal applied again. Same story.

He made a third appointment, for Feb. 14. Still no permit.

He made a fourth, for March 6.

This time, he was told Israel needed 14 more days to process the application, so he postponed the appointment to March 27. The PA's financial coverage expired, so he reapplied. The Israelis said they needed a new medical report because the one from December had expired.

"I spent the past three months running back and forth," he said. "I told everyone I saw: Do the impossible, just get her out. Take her alone, without an escort, and drop her off at the hospital."

He made a sixth appointment, for April 5.

On Friday, March 25, Fatma woke up early. She played with her father and kissed her newborn baby brother. She wanted chicken wings for lunch, so her father went out to get some.

Anything for his little girl.

While he was out, his brother called and said Fatma seemed tired. When he got home, his relatives were waiting outside for the ambulance. At the hospital, she was pronounced dead upon arrival.

The medical report listed the cause of death as cardiac arrest, caused by the enlargement of the heart, caused by the atrial septal defect.

Jalal would have added Israel to the chain of events.

"This is an intentional killing. My daughter was the victim of blockade and closure," he said. "What did she do to deserve this? She had all the papers."

Dr. Merfeq al-Farra, a pediatrician who saw Fatma several times at his clinic, said the hole in her heart had caused pulmonary hypertension, putting her at risk of stroke.

"If the hole is 4 millimeters, we can treat it in Gaza, but the hole in her heart was large, 20 millimeters, and this requires specialized child open-heart surgery that is unavailable in Gaza," he said. "That's why the hospital issued her at least four urgent referrals."

Dr. Abraham Lorber, the former head of pediatric cardiology at Israel's Rambam Health Care Campus, said ASD alone is rarely fatal. Doctors often recommend elective surgery later in life to prevent symptoms from emerging. Sometimes they discover the congenital defect in adults.

That might have led the Israeli officers weighing Fatma's course of treatment to conclude her life was not in danger.

But Lorber, who did not treat Fatma, said ASD can aggravate other heart and lung conditions. In that case, it must be treated quickly, especially if the patient has trouble breathing.

"It wouldn't just be a matter of correcting ASD. The patient would have likely needed other interventions,

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not just surgery," he said. "This patient most probably had underlying conditions."

Regardless of the diagnosis, he said, her chances of survival would have much been better at the hospital in Jerusalem.

That day at the emergency room in Gaza, Jalal would have tried anything.

"I told the doctor, take my heart and put it in her," he said. "I felt like it was me who died, not her."

Ten days after his daughter's death, he received another text message from Israel. The application was still pending.

Kremlin crackdown silences war protests, from benign to bold

By The Associated Press undefined

A former police officer who discussed Russia's invasion on the phone. A priest who preached to his congregation about the suffering of Ukrainians. A student who held up a banner with no words — just asterisks.

Hundreds of Russians are facing charges for speaking out against the war in Ukraine since a repressive law was passed last month that outlaws the spread of "false information" about the invasion and disparaging the military.

Human rights groups say the crackdown has led to criminal prosecutions and possible prison sentences for at least 23 people on the "false information" charge, with over 500 others facing misdemeanor charges of disparaging the military that have either led to hefty fines or are expected to result in them.

"This is a large amount, an unprecedentedly large amount" of cases, said Damir Gainutdinov, head of the Net Freedoms legal aid group focusing on free speech cases, in an interview with The Associated Press.

The Kremlin has sought to control the narrative of the war from the moment its troops rolled into Ukraine. It dubbed the attack a "special military operation" and increased the pressure on independent Russian media that called it a "war" or an "invasion," blocking access to many news sites whose coverage deviated from the official line.

Sweeping arrests stifled antiwar protests, turning them from a daily event in large cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg into rare occurrences barely attracting any attention.

Still, reports of police detaining single picketers in different Russian cities come in almost daily.

Even seemingly benign actions have led to arrests.

A man was detained in Moscow after standing next to a World War II monument that says "Kyiv" for the city's heroic stand against Nazi Germany and holding a copy of Tolstoy's "War and Peace." Another was reportedly detained for holding up a package of sliced ham from the meat producer Miratorg, with the second half of the name crossed off so it read: "Mir" — "peace" in Russian.

A law against spreading "fake news" about the war or disparaging the military was passed by parliament in one day and took force immediately, effectively exposing anyone critical of the conflict to fines and prison sentences.

The first publicly known criminal cases over "fakes" targeted public figures like Veronika Belotserkovskaya, a Russian-language cookbook author and popular blogger living abroad, and Alexander Nevzorov, a TV journalist, film director and former lawmaker.

Both were accused of posting "false information" about Russian attacks on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine on their widely followed social media pages — something Moscow has vehemently denied, insisting that Russian forces only hit target military targets.

But then the scope of the crackdown expanded, with police seemingly grabbing anyone.

Former police officer Sergei Klokov was detained and put in pretrial detention after discussing the war with his friends on the phone. His wife told the Meduza news site that in casual conversation at home, Klokov, who was born in Irpin near Kyiv and whose father still lived in Ukraine when Russian troops rolled in, condemned the invasion.

Klokov was charged with spreading false information about the Russian armed forces and faces up to 10 years in prison.

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St. Petersburg artist Sasha Skolichenko also faces up to 10 years in prison on the same charge: She replaced price tags in a grocery store with antiwar flyers. On Wednesday, a court ordered Skolichenko to pretrial detention for 1 1/2 months.

The Rev. Ioann Burdin, a Russian Orthodox priest in a village about 300 kilometers (about 185 miles) northeast of Moscow, was fined 35,000 rubles (\$432) for "discrediting the Russian armed forces" after posting an antiwar statement on his church's website and talking to a dozen congregants during a service about the pain he felt over people in Ukraine dying.

Burdin told AP his speech elicited mixed reactions. "One woman made a scene over the fact that I'm talking about (it) when she just came to pray," he said, adding that he believed it was one of those hearing the sermon who reported him to the police.

Marat Grachev, director of a shop that repairs Apple products in Moscow, similarly got in trouble when he displayed a link to an online petition titled, "No to war" on a screen in the shop. Many customers expressed support when they saw it, but one elderly man demanded it be taken down, threatening to report Grachev to the authorities.

Police soon showed up, and Grachev was charged with discrediting the military. A court ordered him to pay a fine of 100,000 rubles (\$1,236).

Another court ruled against Moscow student Dmitry Reznikov for displaying a blank piece of paper with eight asterisks, which could have been interpreted as standing for "No to war" in Russian -- a popular chant by protesters. The court found him guilty of discrediting the armed forces and fined him 50,000 rubles (\$618) for holding the sign in central Moscow in a mid-March demonstration that lasted only seconds before police detained him.

"It's the theater of the absurd," his lawyer Oleg Filatchev told AP.

A St. Petersburg court last week fined Artur Dmitriev for a sign containing President Vladimir Putin's quote -- albeit with a few words omitted for brevity -- from last year's Victory Day parade marking the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II.

"The war brought about so many unbearable challenges, grief and tears, that it's impossible to forget. There is no forgiveness and justification for those who once again are harboring aggressive plans," Putin had said, according to the Kremlin website.

Dmitriev was fined 30,000 rubles for discrediting the Russian military. That prompted him to post Friday on Facebook: "The phrase by Vladimir Putin, and ergo he himself ... are discrediting the goals of the Russian armed forces. From this moment on, (internet and media regulator) Roskomnadzor must block all speeches by Putin, and true patriots -- take down his portraits in their offices."

Net Freedoms' Gainutdinov said that anything about the military or Ukraine can make a person a target. Even wearing a hat with the blue and gold of the Ukrainian flag or a green ribbon, considered a symbol of peace, have been found to discredit the military, the lawyer added.

Reznikov, who is appealing his conviction for the poster with asterisks, said he found the crackdown scary. After his first misdemeanor conviction, a second strike would result in criminal prosecution and a possible prison term of up to three years.

Both Burdin and Grachev, who also are appealing, received donations that exceeded their fines.

"I realized how important it is, how valuable it is to receive support," Grachev said.

Burdin said the publicity about his case spread his message far beyond the dozen or so people who initially heard his sermon -- the opposite of what the authorities presumably intended by fining him.

"It's impossible to call it anything other than the providence of God," the priest added. "The words that I said reached a much larger number of people."

East and Horn of Africa prep for worst drought in decades

By WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

MOMBASA, Kenya (AP) — Agricultural workers in the east and Horn of Africa are preparing for their most severe drought in 40 years, as authorities warn that higher temperatures and less than normal rainfall was

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recorded by weather agencies in March and April this year.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development said rains will likely fail for a fourth consecutive year, triggering fears of increased cases of malnutrition, threats to livelihoods and severe risks for 29 million people in the region. Meteorologists are linking the unfolding drought to human-caused climate change which is leading to increased warming in the Indian Ocean, causing more frequent cyclones.

Like most of Africa, the east and the Horn's economic mainstay is agriculture, which is rain-fed, making it vulnerable to extreme weather events. Mama Charity Kimaru, who practices mixed farming by rearing livestock and planting cereals and vegetables in her 30-acre farm in Nyandarua, some 80 miles (126 kilometers) north of Nairobi, is among the farmers who are preparing for the worst outcomes. Kimaru says that increased temperatures recorded over the past few months have denied her livestock pasture and the crops she had planted in anticipation of the long rains season have failed.

The weather agency previously said in February that the region should prepare for a "wetter than average" long rains season, which normally pours from March to May, but the agency revised its previous forecasts this week.

"The March, April, May rains are crucial for the region and, sadly, we are looking at not just three, but potentially four consecutive failed seasons," Workneh Gebeyehu, the executive secretary of the intergovernmental agency, said. "This, coupled with other stress factors such as conflicts in both our region and Europe, the impact of COVID-19, and macro-economic challenges, has led to acute levels of food insecurity across the greater Horn of Africa."

Below average rainfall for 2022 are likely to prolong the already extremely dry conditions which have not been experienced to this degree since 1981. Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia — which will be severely impacted by the reduced rains — are already in the midst of a dire famine.

Lack of rainfall during the short rains season late last year and the ongoing drought during the current long rains season has already led to crop failures and livestock deaths, causing high food prices and intercommunal conflicts over scarce pasture and dwindling water resources.

"Whenever we have intense cyclones in the Southwest Indian Ocean, we always prepare for a long drought season in eastern and the Horn regions," Evans Mukolwe, the former science director at the U.N., said. "This is because the cyclones suck much of the moisture depriving the region of the much-needed precipitation. It has been the pattern for decades."

Aid organizations are already concerned about how worsening climate change impacts will affect the region in future decades.

"This is not the Horn's first drought, nor is it likely to be its last," said Sean Granville-Ross, the regional director for Africa for the aid agency Mercy Corps. "As the climate emergency worsens, droughts will become more frequent and severe. People affected by climate change cannot wait for one crisis to end before preparing for the next."

"The international response must prioritize immediate needs while allocating additional resources to long-term, smart interventions that will result in long-term change and assist communities in becoming more drought-resistant."

The U.N. humanitarian office warned last week that the current drought "risks becoming one of the worst climate induced emergencies in recent history in the Horn of Africa." It also said that the \$1.5 billion drought response appeal required to assist some 5.5 million people in Somali remains seriously underfunded.

Police search for motive in Brooklyn subway suspect's videos

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, MICHAEL R. SISAK and BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Frank James posted dozens of videos ranting about race, violence and his struggles with mental illness. One stands out for its relative calm: A silent shot of a packed New York City subway car in which he raises his finger to point out passengers, one by one.

Even as police arrested James on Wednesday in the Brooklyn subway shooting that wounded 10 people, they were still searching for a motive from a flood of details about the 62-year-old Black man's life.

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An erratic work history. Arrests for a string of mostly low-level crimes. A storage locker with more ammo. And hours of rambling, bigoted, profanity-laced videos on his YouTube channel that point to a deep, simmering anger.

"This nation was born in violence, it's kept alive by violence or the threat thereof, and it's going to die a violent death," says James in a video where he takes on the moniker "Prophet of Doom."

After a 30-hour manhunt, James was arrested without incident after a tipster — thought by police to be James himself — said he could be found near a McDonald's on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Mayor Eric Adams triumphantly proclaimed "We got him!" Police said their top priority was getting the suspect, now charged with a federal terrorism offense, off the streets as they investigate their biggest unanswered question: Why?

A prime trove of evidence, they said, is his YouTube videos. He seems to have opinions about nearly everything — racism in America, New York City's new mayor, the state of mental health services, 9/11, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and Black women.

A federal criminal complaint cited one in which James ranted about too many homeless people on the subway and put the blame on New York City's mayor.

"What are you doing, brother?" he said in the video posted March 27. "Every car I went to was loaded with homeless people. It was so bad, I couldn't even stand."

James then railed about the treatment of Black people in an April 6 video cited in the complaint, saying, "And so the message to me is: I should have gotten a gun, and just started shooting."

In a video posted a day before the attack, James criticizes crime against Black people and says things would only change if certain people were "stomped, kicked and tortured" out of their "comfort zone."

Surveillance cameras spotted James entering the subway system turnstiles Tuesday morning, dressed as a maintenance or construction worker in a yellow hard hat and orange working jacket with reflective tape.

Police say fellow riders heard him say only "oops" as he set off one smoke grenade in a crowded subway car as it rolled into a station. He then set off a second smoke grenade and started firing, police said. In the smoke and chaos that ensued, police say James made his getaway by slipping into a train that pulled in across the platform and exited after the first stop.

Left behind at the scene was the gun, extended magazines, a hatchet, detonated and undetonated smoke grenades, a black garbage can, a rolling cart, gasoline and the key to a U-Haul van, police said.

That key led investigators to James, and clues to a life of setbacks and anger as he bounced among factory and maintenance jobs, got fired at least twice, moved among Milwaukee, Philadelphia, New Jersey and New York.

Investigators said James had 12 prior arrests in New York and New Jersey from 1990 to 2007, including for possession of burglary tools, criminal sex act, trespassing, larceny and disorderly conduct.

James had no felony convictions and was not prohibited from purchasing or owning a firearm. Police said the gun used in the attack was legally purchased at an Ohio pawn shop in 2011. A search of James' Philadelphia storage unit and apartment turned up at least two types of ammunition, including the kind used with an AR-15 assault-style rifle, a taser and a blue smoke cannister.

Police said James was born and raised in New York City. In his videos, he said he finished a machine shop course in 1983 then worked as a gear machinist at Curtiss-Wright, an aerospace manufacturer in New Jersey, until 1991 when he was hit by a one-two punch of bad news: He was fired from his job and, soon after, his father whom he had lived with in New Jersey died.

Records show James filed a complaint against the aerospace company in federal court soon after he lost his job alleging racial discrimination, but it was dismissed a year later by a judge. He says in one video, without offering specifics, that he "couldn't get any justice for what I went through."

A spokesperson for Curtiss-Wright didn't immediately respond to a call seeking comment.

James describes going in and out of several mental health facilities, including two in the Bronx borough of New York City in the 1970s.

"Mr. Mayor, let me say to you I'm a victim of your mental health program in New York City," James says

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in a video earlier this year, adding he is "full of hate, full anger and bitterness."

James says he later was a patient at Bridgeway House, a mental health facility in New Jersey, although that could not be immediately confirmed. Messages left with the facility were not returned.

"My goal at Bridgeway in 1997 was to get off Social Security and go back to f----- work," he says in a video, adding that he enrolled in a college and took a course in computer-aided design and manufacturing.

James says he eventually got a job at telecommunications giant Lucent Technologies in Parsippany, New Jersey, but says he ended up getting fired and returned to Bridgeway House, this time not as a patient but as an employee on the maintenance staff. A message seeking comment was sent to Lucent Technologies.

"I just want to work. I want to be a person that's productive," he said.

Touches of that earnest, struggling man showed up after James' parked car was hit in Milwaukee. Eugene Yarbrough, pastor of Mt. Zion Wings of Glory Church of God in Christ next door to James' apartment, said James was impressed that the pastor owned up to hitting the car. Neither James nor anyone else was there to see the accident. And James called him up to say so.

"I just couldn't believe it would be him," Yarbrough said. "But who knows what people will do?"

Destructive wildfires rage in New Mexico, Colorado

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN and PAUL DAVENPORT Associated Press

Firefighters scouted the drought-stricken mountainsides around a New Mexico village as they looked for opportunities to slow a wind-driven wildfire that a day earlier had burned at least 150 homes and other structures while displacing thousands of residents and forcing the evacuation of two schools.

Homes were among the structures that had burned, but officials on Wednesday did not have a count of how many were destroyed in the blaze that torched at least 6.4 square miles (16.6 square kilometers) of forest, brush and grass on the east side of the community of Ruidoso, said Laura Rabon, spokesperson for the Lincoln National Forest.

Rabon announced emergency evacuations of a more densely populated area during a briefing Wednesday afternoon as the fire jumped a road where crews were trying to hold the line. She told people to get in their cars and go.

New Mexico State Police released a statement late Wednesday saying two people have been found dead in a residence. Their identities will not be released until the Office of the Medical Examiner can positively identify them.

Strong winds prevented forced a suspension of the aerial attack on the flames and kept authorities from getting a better estimate of how large the fire has grown. But some planes returned to the air as winds subsided late in the day, and seven airtankers and two helicopters have now been assigned to the fire, Forest Service officials said Wednesday evening.

While the cause of the blaze was under investigation, fire officials and forecasters warned Wednesday that persistent dry and windy conditions had prompted red flag warnings for a wide swath that included almost all of New Mexico, half of Texas and parts of Colorado and the Midwest.

Five new large fires were reported Tuesday, and nearly 1,600 wildland firefighters and support personnel were assigned to large fires in the southwestern, southern and Rocky Mountain areas, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

Hotter and drier weather coupled with decades of fire suppression have contributed to an increase in the number of acres burned by wildfires, fire scientists say. And the problem is exacerbated by a more than 20-year Western megadrought that studies link to human-caused climate change. The fire season has become year-round given changing conditions that include earlier snowmelt and rain coming later in the fall.

In Ruidoso, officials declared a state of emergency and said school classes were canceled Wednesday as the village — about 140 miles (225 kilometers) northeast of El Paso, Texas — coped with power outages due to down power lines.

The residences that burned were mostly a mix of trailers and single-family homes, and close to 4,000

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people were displaced by evacuations that were ordered Tuesday. That number was expected to grow with the latest call for residents to leave.

Village spokeswoman Kerry Gladden said authorities spent part of Wednesday surveying as much damage as possible before the winds kicked up again. Air tankers also were able to drop a few loads of slurry, and more air support was expected Thursday.

"Right now, everybody is just rallying around those who had to be evacuated," Gladden said. "We're just trying to reach out to make sure everyone has places to stay."

Donations were pouring in from other communities in southern New Mexico. State officials said emergency grants have been approved that will provide resources to firefighters and for other emergency efforts.

Ruidoso in 2012 was hit by one of the most destructive wildfires in New Mexico history, when a lightning-sparked blaze destroyed more than 240 homes and burned nearly 70 square miles (181 square kilometers).

Rabon said Wednesday that no precipitation was in the forecast and humidity levels remained in the single digits, which would make stopping the flames more difficult.

"Those extremely dry conditions are not in our favor," she said.

Another wildfire in the Lincoln National Forest northwest of Ruidoso burned at least 400 acres (1.6 square kilometers) after it was sparked Tuesday by power lines downed by high winds. Crews confirmed Wednesday that 10 structures there were lost.

Elsewhere in New Mexico, wildfires were burning along the Rio Grande south of Albuquerque, in mountains northwest of the community of Las Vegas and in grasslands along the Pecos River near the town of Roswell.

In Colorado, crews were battling wind-whipped grass fires that had destroyed two homes and forced temporary evacuations.

Rep. Langevin: Public service has changed since Capitol riot

By JENNIFER McDERMOTT Associated Press

WARWICK, R.I. (AP) — After the Capitol riot, longtime U.S. Rep. Jim Langevin said he thought briefly that the foolishness and recklessness of dividing the country would finally stop. That didn't happen, and the Rhode Island Democrat says it's one reason why he's leaving Congress.

Langevin saw some of his Republican colleagues saying enough is enough. He said he hoped they would all rededicate themselves to finding common ground, recognizing that as Americans, "we're in this together."

Instead, Langevin said, the country became further divided. It was disheartening to see "far too few" Republicans holding the former president accountable for pointing the crowd toward Congress and firing them "like a cannon," he added.

Langevin narrowly missed being in the Capitol building on Jan. 6, 2021.

His staff suggested he go to his office near the House floor, so he'd be nearby when called to witness the vote count and certification firsthand for President Joe Biden. Langevin said thankfully he decided to work at the congressional office building.

Shortly after the insurrection's one-year anniversary, Langevin announced he wouldn't seek a 12th term.

Langevin, the first quadriplegic to serve in Congress, said he wants to be with his family and friends, the commute has taken a physical toll and he wants to try something new closer to home while he's healthy and young enough to do so.

The polarization shown by Jan. 6 and its aftermath was a factor, too. In nearly 22 years in Congress, Langevin always tried to work across the aisle.

"I don't want to overplay it and say that, you know, all of a sudden my mind changed because of Jan. 6. That would not be accurate, but has it had an impact? Public service, it's changed," he said in an interview with The Associated Press. "Things are different, the political environment is different. And I'm not the political guy for the most part, I'm a policy wonk. I like rolling up my sleeves and solving problems. I thrive on working in a bipartisan environment."

Langevin leads a bipartisan caucus on career and technical education with Republican U.S. Rep. Glenn

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Thompson of Pennsylvania. Thompson said one of the reasons they work well together is that neither has "surrendered" to the "extreme voices" in their parties.

"We're part of the folks in the middle," he said. "Neither one of us are show horses, we're work horses. And we want to work. We want to get things done for the American people."

Republican U.S. Rep. Michael McCaul, of Texas, said Congress needs more people like Langevin. The two co-founded the Congressional Cybersecurity Caucus together.

"I never saw him as a Democrat or Republican," McCaul said. "He was just a guy that really cared about the country, cared about the national security policies of the country, and just wanted to get good things done."

McCaul hopes the departure of Langevin and centrists like him doesn't signal the end of an era, turning the legislature into a divisive body that's far left and far right.

"I think most Americans are kind of center, maybe a little center right, but they're in the middle," McCaul said. "And Jim really represented that well. I try to do that as well. And he's the person I can work with and a person I can trust. And you know, trust is a hard thing to find in Washington."

Langevin, who turns 58 this month, was elected to Rhode Island's Constitutional Convention in 1986 while still in college. He wanted to serve the people of Rhode Island because of the way they rallied around him after an accident when he was a 16-year-old police cadet.

Two officers at the Warwick Police Department were looking at a new gun. One of them, not realizing it was loaded, pulled the trigger to test it and a bullet struck Langevin's neck, severing his spinal cord.

After the constitutional convention, Langevin served in Rhode Island's legislature, then overhauled Rhode Island's elections system as the nation's youngest secretary of state.

When he got to Congress in 2001, Langevin said, "Congress wasn't quite ready for me yet."

Temporary ramps and door openers were added. His desk was raised. Movable speaker's lecterns were mounted. A holder was added to his voting card so he could slide it into the machine.

Nearly two decades later, two lifts were added by the speaker's rostrum in the House so Langevin could become the first wheelchair user to serve as speaker pro tempore. He presided as the chamber marked 20 years of the Americans with Disabilities Act — a seminal moment in his career.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has called him "a force for Americans with disabilities." Langevin worked to pass legislation to make air travel and local transit more accessible, and to strengthen the ADA.

Langevin is proud of voting for the Affordable Care Act to ensure coverage for millions of Americans and make health care more affordable. He regrets that some provisions in the House version weren't in the final law, such as a public option to ensure competition in every state.

For his last months in office, Langevin is focused on helping people get through the pandemic. He's deeply concerned about the war in Ukraine. His late great-grandmother immigrated to the United States from Ukraine.

There's speculation Langevin will be the next president of his alma mater, Rhode Island College. Langevin said the position hasn't been offered, though he'd like to consider it after the rest of this term if the college thinks he'd be a good fit.

Langevin met his mentor, Rhode Island U.S. Sen. Claiborne Pell, at the college and became his intern. Langevin has tried to emulate the late senator's statesmanship. Langevin is also a big fan of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

"How could I not be, right," he said. "... FDR was never a person that made his disability the focus of who he was or what he did. He just did his thing."

That's what Langevin says he sought to do too.

"I hope I've made a significant contribution to making people's lives better, the people of Rhode Island, the people of our country," he said.

Langevin is hopeful for the future and for the chances of restoring bipartisanship to Congress.

"I believe that the pendulum does come back to the center eventually," he said, "and we will be able to find that common ground."

EXPLAINER: Why the term 'genocide' matters in Ukraine war

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When President Joe Biden declares Russia's Ukraine war "genocide," it isn't just another strong word.

Calling a campaign that's aimed at wiping out a targeted group "genocide" not only increases pressure on a country to act, it can oblige it to. That's partly because of a genocide treaty approved by the U.N. General Assembly after World War II, signed by the United States and more than 150 other nations.

The convention was the work of, among others, a Polish Jew whose family was murdered by Nazi Germany and its accomplices. The advocates pushed for something that would make the world not just condemn but actually prevent and ensure prosecution for future genocides.

In comments Tuesday, Biden accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of trying to "wipe out the idea of even being a Ukrainian." Other world leaders have not gone as far. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said Russia's behavior in Ukraine "doesn't look far short of genocide," but the U.K. has not officially used the term, saying only a court can make such a designation.

A look at what's involved in that decision, and what it means when a world leader declares a genocide:
WHAT DOES 'GENOCIDE' MEAN?

It's a surprisingly modern word for an ancient crime. A Jewish lawyer from Poland, Raphael Lemkin, coined it at the height of World War II and the Holocaust. Lemkin wanted a word to describe what Nazi Germany was then doing to Europe's Jews, and what Turkey had done to Armenians in the 1910s: killing members of a targeted group of people, and ruthlessly working to eradicate their cultures.

Lemkin paired "geno," a Greek word meaning race, and "cide," a Latin word meaning kill. Lemkin dedicated his life to having genocide recognized and criminalized.

In 1948, after Adolf Hitler and his accomplices systematically murdered 6 million Jews in Europe, the U.N. General Assembly approved the Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide.

WHAT'S THE LEGAL DEFINITION?

Under the genocide convention, the crime is trying to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in part or in whole.

That includes mass killings, but also actions including forced sterilization, abuse that inflicts serious harm or mental suffering, or wrenching children of a targeted group away to be raised by others.

IS RUSSIA COMMITTING GENOCIDE IN UKRAINE?

The case may hang in part on Putin's own words.

Russian forces are widely accused of carrying out wholesale abuses of Ukraine's civilians, including mass killings.

Those would be war crimes. But do they amount to genocide?

It's all about intent, argues Bohdan Vitvitsky, a former U.S. federal prosecutor and former special adviser to Ukraine's prosecutor general.

"Any attempt to determine whether the crimes committed by Russian troops in Ukraine are driven by genocidal intent must necessarily focus on the statements of Russian President Vladimir Putin," Vitvitsky wrote for the Atlantic Council think tank this week.

Putin long has denied any standing for Ukraine to exist as a separate nation, or Ukrainians as a separate people. He cites history, when Ukraine was part of the Russian empire, and later of the Soviet Union.

In a long essay last year, "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," Putin made clear the depth of his determination on the matter. He called the modern border dividing Russia and Ukraine "our great common misfortune and tragedy."

Putin and Russian state media falsely call Ukrainian leaders "Nazis" and "drug addicts." Putin has called his military campaign in Ukraine one of de-Nazification.

Gissou Nia, a human-rights lawyer who worked on war crime trials at the Hague, points to two alleged acts by Russia in Ukraine as also possibly showing intent of genocide: Reports of deportation of thousands

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of Ukrainian children to Russia, and an account, from Ukraine's government, of Russian soldiers telling 25 detained women and girls in Bucha that the Russians aimed to rape them to the point that they never bear any Ukrainian children.

WHY DOES IT MATTER IF WORLD LEADERS USE "GENOCIDE" TO DESCRIBE RUSSIA'S ACTIONS?

Embedded in the genocide convention is an obligation that the U.S. and other signers of the treaty have treated warily — if they acknowledge a genocide is occurring, they're committed to ensuring investigation and prosecution, at the least.

People and countries committing genocide "shall be punished," the treaty declares, seeking to crush any wiggle room.

U.S. leaders for decades dodged using the word "genocide" to avoid increasing the pressure on them to act as mass killings targeted classes of people or ethnic groups in Cambodia, Bosnia, Iraq, Rwanda and elsewhere.

Regretting his failure to do more to stop the killing of 800,000 ethnic Tutsis by Hutus in Rwanda in 1994, Bill Clinton in June 1999 became the first U.S. president to recognize an act of genocide as it was playing out, saying Serb forces carrying out a deadly campaign against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo were attempting genocide.

NATO intervened, lobbing 78 days of airstrikes that forced Serbian fighters' withdrawal from Kosovo. An international tribunal charged Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic with war crimes, although Milosevic died before his trial concluded.

Starting in 2005, world also leaders embraced — in principle — responsibility for collective action to stop genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Atrocities and targeted campaigns against groups continue around the world, however, and the so-called responsibility to protect is seldom invoked.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE U.S. DOES DECLARE RUSSIAN ACTIONS TO BE GENOCIDE?

U.S. leaders long have feared that acknowledging genocide would require them to intervene, even to send in troops, with all the risks, costs and political backlash that would entail. It's been a main reason leaders limit themselves to angry statements and humanitarian aid.

Biden is adamant the U.S. will not use its own military to confront Russian forces on behalf of Ukraine. Doing so would risk World War III, he says.

He and allies in Europe and elsewhere already are intervening by sanctioning Russia and by sending weapons and other support to Ukraine for its defense.

Biden and other Western leaders also have called for war crimes trials. The International Criminal Court already has started an investigation. But longstanding U.S. opposition to the International Criminal Court, over worries that U.S. troops could face prosecution there one day, complicates such prosecutions. So can Russia's veto power on the U.N. Security Council. And practically speaking, bringing Putin before a court is a long shot.

In the past, Americans' opposition to entanglement in foreign wars also has helped discourage U.S. leaders from doing more to stop possible acts of genocide.

But Russia's invasion of a neighboring country and brutality against Ukraine's people have angered Americans in a way that genocidal campaigns in Cambodia, Kurdish areas of Iraq and elsewhere did not.

A recent poll by the Associated Press and NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 40% of people in America believe the U.S. should have a "major role" in ending Russia's invasion. Just 13% think the U.S. shouldn't be involved at all.

When Biden 'speaking from his heart' doesn't speak for US

By CALVIN WOODWARD and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There's no such thing as a purely personal opinion from the Oval Office on policies that matter. Armchair quarterbacking when you're the president is fraught when you're the one with the ball.

Armies can move on your words; markets can convulse; diplomacy can unravel.

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That has not stopped President Joe Biden from viscerally weighing in on the Ukraine war — labeling Russia's Vladimir Putin a war criminal, appearing to advocate an overthrow in Moscow, branding Russian war actions as genocide — then saying it's all his personal, not presidential, opinion.

It's sowing confusion in dangerous times.

America is no mere bystander in this conflict. The U.S. is Ukraine's chief supplier of arms from the West, a key source of military intelligence for Kyiv and a driving force behind global sanctions against Russia. It has generations of experience in how to talk to and about its historic nuclear rival.

But on consequential superpower subjects, Biden these days is "speaking from his heart," his aides have said repeatedly. Not unlike his predecessor, he is reacting at times to what he sees on TV. He's not always to be taken literally, it is argued.

A declaration of genocide is history's harshest judgment against a country, one that can bind the signers of a United Nations treaty to intervene. Concern about that obligation dissuaded the U.S. from recognizing the Rwandan Hutus' killing of 800,000 ethnic Tutsis in 1994 as genocide. It took more than a century for a U.S. president, Biden last year, to recognize the Armenian genocide.

But in remarks in Iowa on Tuesday, Biden equated Russia's mass killings of Ukrainian civilians to genocide and stuck with that position on his way back to Washington: "Yes, I called it genocide," he affirmed. Lawyers will decide if Russia's conduct met the international standard, the president added, but "it sure seems that way to me."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy praised Biden's remarks. "True words of a true leader," he tweeted. "Calling things by their names is essential to stand up to evil."

But as the war unfolds in Europe, French President Emmanuel Macron warned, "I'm not sure if the escalation of words serves our cause."

"I am prudent with terms today," Macron said. "Genocide has a meaning. ... It's madness what's happening today. It's unbelievable brutality and a return to war in Europe. But at the same time I look at the facts, and I want to continue to try the utmost to be able to stop the war and restore peace."

At the White House last month, Biden said of Putin, "I think he is a war criminal," in response to a shouted question as he walked out of an unrelated bill-signing reception. He said the same again when visiting U.S. troops in Poland.

The White House hastened to say that did not necessarily signal U.S. policy.

"He was speaking from his heart and speaking from what he's seen on television, which is barbaric actions by a brutal dictator, through his invasion of a foreign country," said press secretary Jen Psaki.

Psaki on Wednesday dismissed the notion that anyone was confused by the idea of Biden's personal comments not reflecting federal policy. She said Biden ran for office promising "he would shoot from the shoulder, is his phrase that he often uses, and tell it to them straight. And his comments yesterday, not once but twice, and on war crimes are an exact reflection of that."

As well, after meeting Ukrainian children torn from their families in the war, Biden sent his staff scrambling to explain his apparent endorsement of Moscow regime change when he said of Putin: "For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power."

Again, not U.S. policy.

"I was expressing the moral outrage that I felt toward this man," Biden said days later. "I wasn't articulating a policy change."

It was Donald Trump who jettisoned the idea of a scripted presidency every way he could, with his multitude of tweets leading the way. Some reflected policy. Some just mirrored what was in his head at the moment.

"We made a dramatic transition during the Trump presidency" in coming to realize that a president may not be speaking for the government or the country at times, but only for himself, said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. She credits the Biden White House with being quick to set the record straight when that happens.

In Jamieson's academic world of political rhetoric, some public figures like Barack Obama are considered self-monitors — they hear what they are saying as they say it and catch themselves in progress when

they go adrift. Biden, she says, lacks this filter.

"Obama was a high self monitor," she said. "Biden is not. The distance between thought and expression for Biden is not very wide."

Along with longtime foreign-policy credentials and a deep knowledge of how government works, Biden has a history of loose lips and letting his emoting get the better of him.

That caused occasional friction when he was Obama's vice president, as when Biden endorsed same-sex marriage rights in a 2012 TV interview before his boss was quite ready to do so. Biden "probably got out a little bit over his skis, but out of generosity of spirit," Obama said at the time, adding that he would have "preferred to have done this in my own way, on my own terms."

White House aides say Biden's pronouncements reflect that he's never been one to hold his tongue through his five decades in Washington, even when it gets him into trouble.

They see Biden's declarations, separate from his government's policies, as reactions not just to the horrifying scenes in Ukraine, but also to political pressure at home to say and do more in response to Russia's invasion.

To David Axelrod, former adviser to the ever-cautious Obama, Biden's remark that Putin "cannot remain in power" illustrated the Washington adage that "everyone's strength is their weakness."

Biden's strength is his empathy and authenticity, Axelrod said on his recent podcast, and that can also be a weakness when a president says the wrong thing in a time of crisis.

The risk from off-the-cuff remarks is hardly new with Biden. In 2016, Axelrod foresaw a similar concern from Trump's capacity for highly contentious comments.

"You can't, when you're president of the United States, just shoot first and think about it later in terms of what you say," he said then, "because people can actually start shooting based on what you say."

Capitol riot defendant: I was following Trump's instructions

By JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

An Ohio man charged with storming the U.S. Capitol and stealing a coat rack testified that he joined thousands of protesters in ransacking the building last year on what he thought were orders from the president, Donald Trump.

Dustin Byron Thompson, 38, of Columbus, Ohio, said Wednesday he took to websites after being laid off from his exterminator job in March 2020 and in his pandemic doldrums fell under Trump's sway as he bought into conspiracy theories and "went down the rabbit hole on the internet."

On trial in U.S. District Court in Washington, Thompson testified that the claim that the election was stolen seemed credible to him because it was coming from the president. His defense team is the first to argue that Trump and those connected to him were responsible for the actions of the mob that day.

"It seems like everyone was attacking him (Trump). He needed someone to stand up for him, and I was trying to do that," Thompson said.

Under questioning by the prosecution, Thompson acknowledged that he ignored signs he shouldn't be at the Capitol — broken glass, alarms, chemical irritants in the air — and said he stole the coat rack to keep others from using it as a weapon. He also said he witnessed fierce fighting between police and rioters outside the building, and later ran away from officers. He said he realized weeks later that what he had done was wrong and now feels shame for his actions.

Thompson's jury trial is the third among hundreds of Capitol riot prosecutions. The first two ended with jurors convicting both defendants on all counts. Thompson's defense team is the first to argue that Trump and those connected to him were responsible for the actions of the mob that day.

"If the president is giving you almost an order to do something, I felt obligated to do that," Thompson testified.

Thompson's lawyer sought subpoenas to call Trump and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani as witnesses, but U.S. District Judge Reggie Walton rejected that request. Jurors on Wednesday began listening to recordings of speeches that Trump and Giuliani delivered at a rally before the riot. They were expected

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to finish listening to recordings Thursday morning and begin deliberations later in the day.

Thompson's wife, Sarah Thompson, testified that she voted for Democrat Joe Biden, as well as Democratic presidential nominees Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. She said her husband's views were more moderate then but shifted during the Trump years as he started encountering conspiracy theories. She said she did not share his views but helped arrange his travel to Washington for the "Stop the Steal" rally near the White House because he had a right to protest and she enjoyed having a quiet house.

Much of the prosecution's case was built around testimony from several Capitol Police officers placing Thompson at the scene, wearing a bulletproof vest that he said he found, and carrying a coat rack he took from the Senate Parliamentarian's Office.

More than 770 people have been charged with federal crimes arising from the Jan. 6, 2021, riot. Over 250 of them have pleaded guilty, mostly to misdemeanors. Thompson is the fifth person to be tried on riot-related charges.

On Monday, a jury convicted a former Virginia police officer, Thomas Robertson, of storming the Capitol with another off-duty officer to obstruct Congress from certifying Biden's 2020 electoral victory. Last month, a jury convicted a Texas man, Guy Reffitt, of storming the Capitol with a holstered handgun.

A judge hearing testimony without a jury decided cases against two other Capitol riot defendants at separate bench trials. U.S. District Judge Trevor McFadden acquitted one of them of all charges and partially acquitted the other.

Thompson is charged with six counts: obstructing Congress' joint session to certify the Electoral College vote, theft of government property, entering or remaining in a restricted building or grounds, disorderly or disruptive conduct in a restricted building or grounds, disorderly or disruptive conduct in a Capitol building, and parading, demonstrating or picketing in a Capitol building.

A co-defendant, Robert Lyon, 27, pleaded guilty in March to theft of government property and disorderly conduct. Both counts are misdemeanors punishable by a maximum of one year imprisonment. Walton is scheduled to sentence Lyon on June 3.

Ohio's GOP governor aims to overcome anger in party base

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio (AP) — The school closures, stay-at-home mandates and curfews that Ohio Republican Gov. Mike DeWine imposed early in the pandemic still infuriate Donald Trump's most loyal supporters. His dismissal of the former president's stolen election lie and criticism that Trump "poured gas on the fire" before the U.S. Capitol riot put him at odds with many GOP voters.

But that may not be enough to topple DeWine in the state's upcoming May 3 primary.

Despite some notable splits with Trump, he is entering the final stretch of the campaign in a strong position to win the GOP's nomination for another four-year term. He's facing challenges from three lesser-known conservatives who could essentially split the far-right faithful, with DeWine potentially emerging as a Republican who crossed Trump's base and managed to survive.

"Whatever happens in the election happens, but this was a crucial time in our history," DeWine, 75, said in an interview, referring to his management of the pandemic.

The dynamics harken back to an era when Ohio prized middle-of-the-road candidates, making it a bellwether for presidential elections for decades. But that reputation for moderation eroded under Trump, who won the state in the 2016 and 2020 campaigns. The higher-profile race for an open U.S. Senate seat is perhaps more reflective of Ohio's rightward shift as candidates have spent months trying to out-Trump one another as they seek his coveted endorsement.

So far, the former president has stayed quiet in the governor's race, a credit to DeWine's ability to walk a fine line of expressing support for Trump while also keeping him at a distance. Despite their different approach to the pandemic, which Trump sought to minimize, there was only one hint of a genuine rift between the two men.

That was when DeWine suggested in November 2020 that it was time for Trump to acknowledge that Joe Biden had won the White House. Trump's response was a tweet wondering who would challenge DeWine

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in this year's primary. "Will be hotly contested!" Trump predicted.

Former U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci, who served four terms in Congress, was thought to be DeWine's biggest threat, especially if he could win an endorsement from Trump after getting his backing four years ago in a failed U.S. Senate bid. But some recent polls show Renacci splitting the anti-DeWine vote with Joe Blystone, a farmer who jumped in the race early and built a following in rural Ohio.

Much of the frustration toward DeWine has bubbled up in Republican-dominated rural counties where mask mandates and school shutdowns were met with resistance. Those areas hold the fewest votes yet carry significant weight because Republicans often pile up big enough margins to negate the strong Democratic turnout in the state's big cities.

"They say in politics people forget things. Down here they haven't forgotten," said Dennis Cooper, a member of the Clermont County Republican Party, which overwhelmingly endorsed Renacci over DeWine earlier this year. "It wasn't just one thing. It was one thing on top of another that made no sense."

Still, DeWine has a huge fundraising advantage and a network of supporters built from a political career spanning more than 40 years. Both are why more prominent Republicans in the state decided against challenging him even as dissatisfaction grew.

Ryan Stubenrauch, a former DeWine policy adviser who's now a GOP consultant, thinks the anger is coming from a vocal minority.

"There's a whole lot of people mad at a lot of things. The last two years have been really rough on people," he said. "I don't know if the party has changed or all of our politics have shifted over the last two years."

One thing that hasn't changed, he said, is DeWine. "He values life just about over everything," Stubenrauch said.

He's an old-school conservative who just months into his first term as governor signed into law what at the time was one of the most stringent abortion restrictions in the nation.

DeWine has leaned on his pro-life stance to explain why that also includes protecting people from COVID-19. He was widely praised early in 2020 for not downplaying the pandemic when he became the first governor to shut down schools statewide.

But the mood soured among Republicans who quickly tired of mask mandates and health orders that closed many small businesses but allowed large retailers to remain open. They saw him putting in restrictions that ran counter to what they were hearing from Trump and conservative governors such as Ron DeSantis in Florida and South Dakota's Kristi Noem.

A hostile state Legislature dominated by DeWine's own party overrode his veto of a bill weakening the governor's ability to respond to public health emergencies.

Renacci said DeWine prioritized "fear over freedom."

Some conservatives have vowed never to vote for DeWine again, according to a handful of county GOP chairs, even if that means sitting out in November.

The winner of the Republican primary will face the Democratic nominee, either former Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley or ex-Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley.

"They're not going to vote again for someone who has disappointed them and not represented them well," said Shelby County Republican Chairwoman Theresa Kerg. "I think people are frustrated and tired of just accepting whoever is given to them."

Texas keeping most truck inspections despite border gridlock

By PAUL J. WEBER and ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas Gov. Greg Abbott on Wednesday defied intensifying pressure over his new border policy that has gridlocked trucks entering the U.S. and shut down some of the world's busiest trade bridges as the Mexican government, businesses and even some allies urge him to relent.

The two-term Republican governor, who has ordered that commercial trucks from Mexico undergo extra inspections as part of a fight with President Joe Biden's administration over immigration, refused to fully reverse course as traffic remains snarled.

The standoff has stoked warnings by trade groups and experts that U.S. grocery shoppers could soon

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notice shortages on shelves and higher prices unless the normal flow of trucks resumes.

Abbott announced Wednesday that he would stop inspections at one bridge in Laredo after reaching an agreement with the governor of neighboring Nuevo Leon in Mexico. But some of the most dramatic truck backups and bridge closures have occurred elsewhere along Texas' 1,200-mile border.

"I understand the concerns that businesses have trying to move product across the border," Abbott said during a visit to Laredo. "But I also know well the frustration of my fellow Texans and my fellow Americans caused by the Biden administration not securing our border."

Abbott said inbound commercial trucks elsewhere will continue to undergo thorough inspections by state troopers until leaders of Mexico's three other neighboring states reach agreements with Texas over security. He did not spell out what those measures must entail.

At the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge, where more produce crosses than any other land port in the U.S., truckers protesting Abbott's order had effectively shut down the bridge since Monday. But Wednesday afternoon, U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials said the protests had concluded and commercial traffic had resumed.

Nuevo Leon Gov. Samuel García joined Abbott in Laredo, where backups on the Colombia Solidarity Bridge have stretched for three hours or longer. Garcia said Nuevo Leon would begin checkpoints to assure Abbott they "would not have any trouble."

Abbott said he was hopeful other Mexican states would soon follow and said those states had been in contact with his office. On Tuesday, the governors of Coahuila and Tamaulipas had sent a letter to Abbott calling the inspections overzealous.

"This policy will ultimately increase consumer costs in an already record 40-year inflated market — holding the border hostage is not the answer," the letter read.

The slowdowns are the fallout of an initiative that Abbott says is needed to curb human trafficking and the flow of drugs. Abbott ordered the inspections as part of "unprecedented actions" he promised in response to the Biden administration winding down a public health law that has limited asylum-seekers in the name of preventing the spread of COVID-19.

In addition to the inspections, Abbott also said Texas would begin offering migrants bus rides to Washington, D.C., in a demonstration of frustration with the Biden administration and Congress. Hours before the news conference in Laredo, Abbott announced the first bus carrying 24 migrants had arrived in Washington.

During the last week of March, Border Protection officials said the border averaged more than 7,100 crossings daily.

White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki called Abbott's order "unnecessary and redundant." Trucks are inspected by U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents upon entering the country, and while Texas troopers have previously done additional inspections on some vehicles, local officials and business owners say troopers have never stopped every truck until now.

Cross-border traffic has plummeted to a third of normal levels since the inspections began, according to Mexico's government. Mexico is a major supplier of fresh vegetables to the U.S., and importers say the wait times and rerouting of trucks to other bridges as far away as Arizona has spoiled some produce shipments.

The escalating pressure on Abbott, who is up for reelection in November, has come from his supporters and members of his own party.

The Texas Trucking Association, which has endorsed Abbott, said that the current situation "cannot be sustained."

John Esparza, the association's president, said he agrees with attempts to find a remedy with Mexico's governors. But he said if talks take long, congestion could overwhelm bridges where inspections by Texas are no longer being done.

"The longer that goes, the more the impact is felt across the country," Esparza said. "It is like when a disaster strikes."

The slowdowns have set off some of the widest backlash to date of Abbott's multibillion-dollar border operation, which the two-term governor has made the cornerstone of his administration. Texas has thousands

of state troopers and National Guard members on the border and has converted prisons into jails for migrants arrested on state trespassing charges.

Critics question how the inspections are meeting Abbott's objective of stopping the flow of migrants and drugs. Asked what troopers had turned up in their truck inspections, Abbott directed the question to the Texas Department of Public Safety.

As of Monday, the agency said it had inspected more than 3,400 commercial vehicles and placed more than 800 "out of service" for violations that included defective brakes, tires and lighting. It made no mention of whether the inspections turned up migrants or drugs.

Actor Cuba Gooding Jr pleads guilty to forcible touching

By TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Actor Cuba Gooding Jr. pleaded guilty Wednesday to forcibly kissing a worker at a New York nightclub in 2018 in a deal that is likely to keep him out of jail.

Gooding also publicly apologized for the first time to two other women who accused him of similar behavior in separate encounters, calling himself a "celebrity figure" who meant no harm.

His admissions were part of a plea deal that came nearly three years after the Oscar-winning "Jerry Maguire" star was arrested in the case that saw several delays as his lawyers sought to get charges reduced or dismissed.

"I apologize for making anybody ever feel inappropriately touched," he said. "I am a celebrity figure. I come into contact with people. I never want them to feel slighted or uncomfortable in any way."

Gooding, 54, accused of violating three different women at various Manhattan night spots in 2018 and 2019, pleaded guilty to just one of the allegations. He told the judge he "kissed the waitress on her lips" without consent at the LAVO New York club.

The deal lets Gooding avoid any possibility of jail time if he continues "alcohol and behavior modification" counseling for six months. After that, he can withdraw the misdemeanor plea and instead plead guilty to a lesser violation of harassment.

Gooding was arrested in June 2019 after a 29-year-old woman told police he fondled her without her consent at Magic Hour Rooftop Bar & Lounge near Times Square.

The accuser in that encounter, Kelsey Harbert, was allowed to speak in court on Wednesday, recounting how, out of nowhere, Gooding grabbed her breast "as if I was a piece of meat for dinner that night."

Harbert, now 31, told the court she thought Gooding was getting off easy, while his accusers continue to suffer.

"I feel very sad and feel very lost for what I can do," she said.

A few months after his arrest, Gooding was charged in two additional cases as more women came forward to accuse him of abuse. The new charges alleged he pinched a server's buttocks after making a sexually suggestive remark to her at TAO Downtown and forcibly touched the woman at LAVO, both in 2018.

Gooding had previously pleaded not guilty to six misdemeanor counts and denied all allegations of wrongdoing. His lawyers have argued that overzealous prosecutors, caught up in the fervor of the #MeToo movement, are trying to turn "commonplace gestures" or misunderstandings into crimes.

Judge Curtis Farber earlier had ruled if the Gooding case went to trial, prosecutors could have called two additional women to testify about their allegations that Gooding also violated them. Prosecutors say the judge had since reversed that decision — a ruling that factored into their decision to not go to trial.

"We credit and believe all the survivors in this case," said prosecutor Coleen Balbert. But under the circumstances, Wednesday's outcome "is a fair and equitable disposition," she added.

Along with the criminal case, Gooding is accused in a lawsuit of raping a woman in New York City in 2013. After a judge issued a default judgment in July because Gooding hadn't responded to the lawsuit, the actor retained a lawyer and is fighting the allegations.

Gloria Allred, an attorney representing three of Gooding's accusers, said in a statement that they would press ahead with civil litigation to hold him accountable.

"Justice was significantly delayed in this case for many reasons, and I do not feel that justice was achieved today with the entry of this plea, although I do understand why under the circumstances that the prosecution offered a plea," she said.

Heal Thyself: Most who tear Achilles tendon can skip surgery

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — It's a weekend warrior's nightmare. You're playing hoops in the driveway and go up for a lay-up. You land and hear a pop: you've torn your Achilles tendon. Do you have surgery or hope it heals with just a cast and rehab? New research says both options led to similar outcomes about a year later.

The Achilles tendon, which connects the muscles in the back of the calf to the heel bone, is the most commonly torn tendon in the body. Most tears are due to trauma or accident while playing sports; men are much more prone to the injury than women.

In the biggest-ever study investigating which treatment is best, scientists in Norway tracked 526 patients — mostly men with an average age of 39 — who ripped their Achilles tendon. They either had minimally invasive surgery, a standard surgery or non-surgical treatment, a brace to immobilize the affected foot and physical therapy. All patients got rehab therapy and were told to avoid risky activities for six months.

There were only slight differences in how everyone had recovered about a year later. There were more people who re-injured their Achilles tendon among those who didn't have surgery — 6.2% versus 0.6% of those who had an operation. And there were more nerve injuries reported in those who had surgery. About 5% of those who had the minimally invasive surgery reported nerve injuries afterward, compared to 2.8% of those who had the standard surgery and 0.6% of those who skipped surgery. The study was published online Wednesday in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

"For the average person, who is not a high-performance athlete, there is no need to have surgery," said Dr. Matthew Costa, a professor of orthopedic trauma surgery at the University of Oxford and not part of the study. Costas said the only benefit to an operation might be to avoid the chance of a repeat injury, but said the chances of that were similar to the risk of a standard complication from surgery, like a wound infection.

He also said surgery could be helpful in other cases, including for people who don't realize they've torn the tendon until long after the injury. In those cases, the tendon may not have been able to heal properly.

Dr. William Levine, chair of orthopedic surgery at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, said patients should talk through their options with their doctor to explore if surgery is appropriate.

"If you tear a tendon, there is a natural healing process in the body that occurs," Levine explained. "But it may heal in a position that's not ideal, and surgeons are able to fix it more precisely."

Dr. Stale Myhrvold, the study's lead author, said that for people to successfully skip surgery, patients need to have their affected foot in a brace early — within the first three days.

"Most acute Achilles tendon ruptures in adults can be treated non-operatively," he said in an email. "Most of my patients choose non-operative treatments after receiving this information."

Ukraine's detention of oligarch close to Putin angers Moscow

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's detention of fugitive Ukrainian oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk, the former leader of a pro-Russian opposition party and a close associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin, has been met with enthusiasm in Kyiv and irritation in Moscow.

Analysts saying Medvedchuk will become a valuable pawn in the Russia-Ukraine talks to end the devastating war that the Kremlin has unleashed on its ex-Soviet neighbor.

Medvedchuk was detained on Tuesday in a special operation carried out by Ukraine's state security service, or the SBU. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has proposed that Russia could win Medvedchuk's freedom by trading Ukrainians now held captive by the Russians.

The 67-year-old oligarch escaped from house arrest several days before the hostilities broke out Feb.

24 in Ukraine. He is facing between 15 years and a life in prison on charges of treason and aiding and abetting a terrorist organization for mediating coal purchases for the separatist, Russia-backed Donetsk republic in eastern Ukraine.

Medvedchuk has close ties with Putin, who is believed to be the godfather of his youngest daughter. His detention has sparked a heated exchange between officials in Moscow and Kyiv.

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy chair of Russia's Security Council and the country's former president, posted threats to Ukrainian authorities on the messaging app Telegram, referring to them as "freaks" and warning them to "carefully look around and firmly lock the doors at night."

Zelenskyy's advisor Mykhailo Podolyak, in response, called Medvedev a "nobody," and said his words were "nasty and, as usual, stupid."

"The friendly relations between Putin and Medvedchuk turn him into a valuable trophy for Kyiv, and in the Kremlin they spark fury and a dangerous desire for revenge," Volodymyr Fesenko, an analyst at the Penta Center, told The Associated Press on Wednesday. "The fate of Medvedchuk will undoubtedly become a subject of bargaining and one of the points of undercover agreements between Kyiv and Moscow."

Zelenskyy has released a photo of Medvedchuk sitting in handcuffs and wearing a camouflage uniform with a Ukrainian flag patch, in which he looks tired but visibly unharmed.

Medvedchuk's wife Oksana Marchenko has appealed to Zelenskyy, calling for her husband to be released and given guarantees that "his life would not be in danger."

"My husband is being persecuted for political reasons against the laws of Ukraine," Marchenko said.

Medvedchuk is the head of the political council of Ukraine's pro-Russian Opposition Platform — For Life party, the largest opposition group in the Ukrainian parliament. He is one of its 44 lawmakers in the 450-seat Rada. The activity of his party has been suspended for the duration of the war at Zelenskyy's initiative.

"The war automatically turned Medvedchuk into (Russia's) accomplice, since he personally advised Putin on Ukrainian affairs and directly or indirectly influenced many of the Kremlin's decisions," Fesenko said. "Zelenskyy no longer needs to be careful, and by arresting Medvedchuk, he wants to show that he is not afraid of the Kremlin and is ready to bargain, having different cards on the negotiating table."

Ivan Bakanov, the head of Ukraine's national security agency, said Wednesday that the Russian security service, the FSB, had planned to evacuate Medvedchuk, disguised as a Ukrainian serviceman, to Moscow through the disputed territory of Transnistria in Moldova, where Russia has troops stationed.

What happens in divorce when digital bullying is in play?

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After Emily Pina's parents separated, the 27-year-old in Phoenix said she spent years listening to her dad beg for the return of his family. He turned up the volume once her mom started dating. Sound familiar?

"It's the same thing as Kanye and Kim," she said.

And like the celebrity couple, her dad's digital life played a role in his breakup as it often does in contentious divorces.

Kanye West, now legally known as Ye, has gone quiet on Instagram after weeks of ranting publicly about Kim Kardashian in the name of fatherhood, which many saw as bullying and intimidation. His targets included Kardashian, her boyfriend, Pete Davidson, and Trevor Noah, who weighed in on "The Daily Show."

In Pina's case, she said her parents' divorce was impacted in part when her father, who has since died, was scammed out of \$10,000 after meeting a woman online and attempting to bring her to the U.S. She turned out to be a man at a computer. In other cases, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook are weaponized directly against an estranged spouse as divorce proceedings progress. Still more divorce cases include digital theft of emails, joint bank accounts and other shared logins.

Dan Stock, a New York family law attorney, warns that sounding off against a partner digitally can have lasting consequences when texts, posts, photos and other wrongs are hauled into court. That's especially

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true when child custody arrangements are on the table.

"Even Kanye shouldn't be trash talking on social media unless, as may be the case, he has a divorce court death wish," Stock said. "It's one thing to be the victim of a social media bully, but it's an early holiday present to the case you are making if you are that victim's divorce attorney."

The sentiment was echoed by a dozen other lawyers who handle divorce, child custody and relationship abuse cases, especially those in California and a handful of other states with relatively new legal standards of "coercive control" as a form of non-physical abuse. The laws allow judges leeway in doling out punishments.

Advocates for victims of harassment and abuse agreed. They said acting out online in pending domestic abuse and divorce cases is routine.

"It's really interesting with Kim. She's pretty much the most protected woman in America, right? All the resources. And she is a great example of how even if you have all the resources, it doesn't matter," said Lenora Claire, a stalking and harassment survivor and victims' advocate in Beverly Hills, California.

"It's been really painful to watch but also really eye opening for the public, who maybe aren't as enmeshed in this issue as I am," she said.

Katie Hood, CEO of the nonprofit One Love Foundation, has seen numerous occasions of social media turned against one person by another in divorces and breakups. Her organization provides young people with tools and resources to spot signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships.

"A breakup is the most dangerous time in a relationship. That's when the abusive person's control has been broken and they do a lot of things to try to wrest back control: control the narrative, control how their ex-partner is perceived," she said.

Watching the Kim and Ye divorce play out on social media has resonated with many victims of relationship abuse, Hood said.

"A lot of people I've talked to are saying this reminds me of my ex. This reminds me of how my ex responded to the breakup," she said. "Social media is an amplification point, a new channel. In the old days, before we had all this, you couldn't see how your ex was moving on with their life or how they were spending their time or who they were with."

Years ago, Hood recalled, a friend went through a breakup and her ex tried to sabotage her through phone calls to employers and family members about what an awful person she was, telling secrets and threatening to share harmful photos.

"Well now you just have to press post on social media or go to LinkedIn or set up fake accounts and bomb people with information that can really be damaging," she said.

There have been a few visible consequences for Ye. He was banned from Instagram for 24 hours and he was disinvited from performing at the April 3 Grammy Awards after slinging a racial slur at Noah, who hosted the ceremony. Ye wound up winning two Grammys but was a no-show as an audience member. He dropped out of headlining at Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, according to TMZ and other reports, giving organizers less than two weeks to find a replacement.

In February, Kardashian spoke up in a Los Angeles Superior Court filing about her estranged husband's unsettling online behavior, urging a judge to ignore his attempts to slow down their divorce and end their marriage as soon as possible. She was successful, after arguing in part:

"Mr. West has disseminated on social media the parties' private communications and misinformation about personal family matters and co-parenting, which has caused emotional distress."

The rapper has been open about his mental health struggles and his diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

"When you're in this state, you're hyper-paranoid about everything, everyone," he told David Letterman in 2019. "This is my experience. Other people have different experiences. Everyone now is an actor. Everything's a conspiracy. You feel the government is putting chips in your head. You feel you're being recorded. You feel all these things."

Ari Lightman, a professor of digital media at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College, studies online communities and the downsides of digital security and privacy. Divorce, he said, plays into broader issues

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on social media.

"In a sense, using social media this way is a protest movement, right? And there's a very vocal group online that's almost acting as judge and jury," Lightman said. "I really like what Trevor Noah said, that we shouldn't cancel Kanye but counsel him."

Dan Jaffe, a family law attorney in Los Angeles, has handled wealthy, high-profile clients for decades. "These are real people with real feelings. Things get lost and convoluted when we use the media to try and resolve these factors. The lawyers should be resolving these factors. Her lawyers absolutely have to be thinking about going in and getting court orders for a temporary restraining order for domestic violence. In California, it can be based on emotional upset, not necessarily physical abuse," he said.

Receiving orders of protection for such behavior due to coercive control is far from guaranteed, said another longtime Los Angeles divorce attorney for the rich and famous, Alexandra Leichter. The standards offer hope for victims but there remains a reluctance among some judges to weigh in on free speech grounds. There's no doubt, she said, that digital technology has "opened up a whole new branch of coercive control."

Judges can "order them to stop, not to use the media, email, not to contact the person," Leichter said. "Does it always work? I'd be lying if I told you that it does. It's a much more complex situation with electronic media."

Lots of broadband money, but US expansion finds speed bumps

By WILSON RING and MARK GILLISPIE Associated Press

VICTORY, Vt. (AP) — In the remote Vermont community of Victory, Town Clerk Tracey Martel says she's regularly frustrated watching a spinning circle on her computer while she tries to complete even the most basic municipal chores online.

"Fast internet would be really good," said Martel, whose community of about 70 was one of the last in Vermont to receive electricity almost 60 years ago. The DSL service she has now works for basic internet, but it can be spotty and it doesn't allow users to access all the benefits of the interconnected world.

About 5 miles (8 kilometers) away as the bird flies in the neighboring community along Miles Pond in the town of Concord, a new fiber optic line is beginning to bring truly high-speed internet to residents of the remote area known as the Northeast Kingdom.

"I'm looking forward to high-speed internet, streaming TV," said Concord resident John Gilchrist, as a crew ran fiber optic cable to his home earlier this year.

The fiber optic cable that is beginning to serve the remote part of Concord and will one day serve Victory is being provided through NEK Broadband, a utility of nearly 50 Vermont towns working to bring high speed internet service to the most remote parts of the state.

NEK Broadband Executive Director Christa Shute said the group's business plan calls for offering services to all potential customers within five years, but given current supply constraints and the shortage of trained technicians, she's beginning to think that goal isn't achievable.

"I think our build will take seven to 10 years," she said.

Congress has appropriated tens of billions of dollars for a variety of programs to help fill the digital gap exposed by the pandemic when millions of people were locked down in their homes with no way to study, work or get online medical care.

The first of those funds are reaching municipalities, businesses and other groups involved in the effort, but some say supply chain issues, labor shortages and geographic constraints will slow the rollout.

The demand for fiber optic cable goes beyond wired broadband to homes and businesses. The cable will help provide the 5G technology now being rolled out by wireless communications providers.

But there's a bottleneck in the supply. Michael Bell, of Corning Optical Communications based in Charlotte, North Carolina, said the issue lies with supply of the protective jacket that surrounds the hair-thin strands of glass that carry information on beams of light.

Currently, some working to expand broadband say delays in getting the fiber optic cable they need can

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exceed a year.

"Based on the capacity we're adding, and the capacity we see our competitors adding, wait times will start going down dramatically as the year progresses and into next year," Bell said. "And I think as we get into next year, the lead time for most customers is going to be well under a year."

Meanwhile, there's a labor shortage for installing the cable. Many in the industry are setting up educational programs to train people to work with the fiber, said Jim Hayes, of the Santa Monica, California-based Fiber Optic Association.

"It needs to be done now," Hayes said. "We're going to need to train probably ten techs for every tech that we've got who's competent to lead them."

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the \$1.5 trillion infrastructure bill passed last fall, says areas that receive broadband speeds of less than 25 megabit downloads and 3 megabit uploads are considered unserved. To qualify for different federal grants through the infrastructure bill and other programs, most finished projects must offer speeds of at least 100 megabits per second for downloads. Upload speeds differ, but most federal grants have a minimum of 20 megabit uploads.

For comparison, it takes 80 seconds to download a 1 gigabyte video at the speed of 100 megabits per second. It takes four times as long — 320 seconds, or more than 5 minutes — at 25 megabits per second.

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration — a part of the Agency of Commerce, which is funding broadband projects across the country through the infrastructure law — is neutral about about how internet service providers reach the speed requirements. Many providers say the key to bringing true high-speed internet service to the entire country is to install fiber optic cable to every nook and cranny.

Deploying high-speed internet in tribal communities and rural areas across the western United States where distances dwarf those of rural northern New England will be even more challenging.

Broadband access on the Navajo Nation — the largest reservation in the U.S. at 27,000 square miles (69,930 square kilometers) in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah — is a mix of dial-up, satellite service, wireless, fiber and mobile data.

The U.S. Department of the Interior, which has broad oversight of tribal affairs, said federal appraisals, rights-of-way permits, environment reviews and archaeological protection laws can delay progress.

The argument against the wireless options currently being used in some areas is they can't offer speeds needed to qualify for the federal grants.

Mike Wendy of the Wireless Internet Service Providers Association said wireless technology is getting faster and more reliable, and wireless connections could be the only way to reach some of the most remote locations.

"The challenge of all this money is to make sure that the unserved are served," said Wendy, whose organization represents about 1,000 fixed wireless internet providers. "Our guys are in those markets right now and they're growing."

Ohio Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said \$233 million in state dollars will be used in his state to expand broadband to over 43,000 households. Other internet service providers have agreed to expand broadband to another 51,000 households. Ohio is expected to receive an additional \$268 million in federal funding to further broadband expansion in the state.

Husted said Ohio is focused on infrastructure while groups and organizations are needed to provide computers and to help people adapt to the fast-growing digital age.

"We're building the road," Husted said. "Access to broadband is like the highway system. That's where we're focused. It doesn't mean there are people who don't need cars or need driver's licenses."

There are still scattered locations across the country that rely on dialup and some people in remote locations use satellite internet services. Some people have no internet options whatsoever.

Martel, the Victory town clerk, said that when the people from NEK Broadband visited, they told residents it would be five to seven years before fiber optic cable would reach the community.

But Shute said her organization hopes to get a grant to connect the most rural areas, which could move the timeline for Victory up to three years.

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Back in East Concord, after having the service for several weeks, Gilchrist said he and his daughter Emily, who is 19 and headed to college in a few months, no longer have to go to the local diner to use the internet. He canceled his expensive satellite TV service, his daughter and her friends have been using it to play online video games and in a few months she will be using the connection while doing college studies. "It's been working great, as far as I'm concerned, all I do is check email," Gilchrist said. "I don't watch TV, but my daughter loves it."

Echoes of one million lost in the spaces they left behind

By DAVID GOLDMAN AP Photographer

Put your son in Sherman Peebles' barber chair and along with a buzz you could count on Peebles, a sheriff's deputy who cut hair as a sideline, to issue a fatherly warning about staying out of trouble.

Now, seven months after the dapper sergeant died of COVID-19, life goes on at the Columbus, Georgia, shop owned by his best friend. But the aching emptiness of Peebles' absence lingers. The brotherly affection he brought to each day, gone missing. The jokes and stories that go untold.

The pandemic has claimed nearly 1 million lives in the U.S., leaving empty spaces in homes and neighborhoods across the country, whether we are aware of them or not.

In portraits of these places left behind, emptiness claims a chair at a nurses station in a busy Alabama hospital, long occupied by a caregiver co-workers recall as "like everybody's mama."

It fills the Arizona bedroom of a 13-year-old lost to COVID, his action figures lined up just as he left them, on the dresser.

It floats, silent, over a wooded path that a retired teacher, who died in the pandemic's early months, often visited with her daughter and granddaughter to enjoy North Carolina's flowers.

You have to look carefully to see the emptiness left by the loss of 1 million souls. But in the shadows, it is all too easy to feel it.

Sherman Peebles worked as a barber on weekends, in addition to his full-time job as a sheriff's deputy. He died of COVID in September, at age 49. His best friend Gerald Riley, who owns the barber shop, still arrives each Saturday expecting to see Peebles' truck parked outside. At day's end, he thinks back to the routine he and his friend of 25 years always followed when closing. "I love you, brother," they'd tell one another. How could Riley have known those would be the last words they'd ever share?

Donovan James Jones' mother can hardly bear to go into the room of her 13-year-old son, who died from complications of COVID in November. Teresita Horne was in the hospital battling the virus herself and never got the chance to say goodbye to her only son. "It's always difficult to go into his room because I always wait for the day for him to come back. I wait for him to come home after school," says Horne, of Buckeye, Arizona. "I would say to the world if they could know one thing about Donovan, he was very kind, especially in today's climate and culture where kindness is a lost concept. I would want people to show some type of kindness to someone for no reason at all, but to be kind."

Eddy Marquez spent 33 years cutting and arranging displays at his work station at US Evergreen Wholesale Florist in New York's flower district. He died of COVID in April 2020 during the deadliest week of the outbreak in the city. His brother-in-law, who lived in the same house, died days earlier. Marquez, who was 59 and the father of three, loved plants, and the yard of the family's home is filled with the hydrangea bushes and fruit trees he tended. His daughter, Ivett Marquez, recalls that her dad worked long hours, but always set aside Sundays for family. "He was an amazing father. He was an amazing husband, an amazing person. My father was just our best friend. You know, I guess his daughter's first love," she says. "He was everything to us. A supporter, a friend, just everything. He loved his job. He loved this family. He loved his house, his plants. That was just Eddy." She now tends the plants in his place.

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Mary Jacq McCulloch loved to explore the paths that wind through the North Carolina Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, often visiting with her daughter and granddaughter. McCulloch's death in April 2020 at 87 came at the height of spring. Now, with the season arriving again, daughter Karen McCulloch is reminded of their drives together around Chapel Hill to gaze at the trees in blossom. Mary Jacq's favorite were the redbuds. "They are stunning magenta," Karen McCulloch says. "I can't see one in bloom without thinking, 'Mom would love this.' Kind of like her – brightly colored and demanding attention."

Arnie Kantrowitz got sick last winter when the omicron variant swept through New York, despite holing up in his home for most of the lockdown. The author, scholar and gay rights activist died of COVID in January. He was 81. "I'm not really grieving fully yet. That's going to go on for the rest of my life," said his long-time partner Larry Mass. "It's like I'm still caring for him. He's still with me." Sometimes when world events make him angry, he thinks about what Kantrowitz would have said to bring him back to earth. He was always good at that. "He's not totally gone," Mass says. "He's there in my heart."

Luis Alfonso Bay Montgomery worked straight through the pandemic's early months in Somerton, Arizona, piloting a tractor among lettuce and cauliflower fields. Even after he began feeling sick in mid-June, he insisted on laboring on, says Yolanda Bay, his wife of 42 years. When he died, at 59, in July 2020, Bay was on her own for the first time since they'd met as teenagers in their native Mexico. In the months since her husband died, Bay, a taxi driver, has worked hard to keep her mind occupied. But memories find a way in. Driving past the fields he plowed, she imagines him on his tractor. "It's time to get rid of his clothes, but ... " she says, unable to finish the sentence. "There are times that I feel completely alone. And I still can't believe it."

Jennifer McClung, a longtime dialysis nurse, was a central figure at the nurses station in her ward at Helen Keller Hospital in Sheffield, Alabama. In November of 2020, McClung, 54, tested positive for COVID. "Mama, I feel like I'm never coming home again," she texted her mother, Stella Olive, from a hospital bed. Her lungs severely damaged by the virus, she died just hours before the nation's vaccination campaign began, on December 14. If only the vaccine had come in time, McClung "might have made it," friend and fellow nurse Christa House says. Today, a decal with a halo and angel's wings marks the place McClung once occupied at a third-floor nurses' station. "It still just seems like she could just walk through the door," McClung's mother says. "I haven't accepted that she's she's gone. I mean, a body is here one day and talking and laughing and loving and and then, poof, they're just gone."

Larry Quackenbush worked as an audio and video producer for the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination based in Springfield, Missouri. He died in August after contracting the virus while caring for his then 12-year-old son, Landon, who came home from summer camp sick with COVID. "Even when he started feeling sick, he kept taking care of everybody," daughter Macy Sweeters said.

"It just hurts so much. He was my best friend."

Neil Lawyer loved to sing while his son, David, accompanied him on the piano in his living room in Bellevue, Washington. The elder Lawyer died at 84 in March 2020, among the first residents of a Seattle area nursing home who succumbed to COVID during the outbreak. At weddings, he joined his sons, grandson and nephew to serenade brides and grooms in a makeshift ensemble dubbed the Moose-Tones. Last October, when one of his granddaughters married, it marked the first family affair without Lawyer there to hold court. The Moose-Tones went on without him. "He would have just been beaming because, you know, it was the most important thing in the world to him late in life, to get together with family," David Lawyer says. "I can honestly tell you he was terribly missed."

Fernando Morales and younger brother Adam Almonte used to sit, always on the same benches, at New York's Fort Tryon Park, eating sandwiches together. On the deadliest day of a horrific week in April

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2020, COVID took the lives of 816 people in New York City alone. Morales, 43, was one of them. Walking through the park, Almonte visualizes long-ago days tossing a baseball with his brother and taking in the view from their bench with sandwiches in hand. He replays old messages to just to hear Morales' voice. "When he passed away it was like I lost a brother, a parent and a friend all at the same time," Almonte says. "That's an irreplaceable type of love."

France's Le Pen warns against sending weapons to Ukraine

PARIS (AP) — French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen warned Wednesday against sending any more weapons to Ukraine, and called for a rapprochement between NATO and Russia once Moscow's war in Ukraine winds down.

Le Pen, an outspoken nationalist who has long ties to Russia, also confirmed that if she unseats President Emmanuel Macron in France's April 24 presidential runoff, she will pull France out of NATO's military command and dial back French support for the whole European Union.

Macron, a pro-EU centrist, is facing a harder-than-expected fight to stay in power, in part because the economic impact of the war is hitting poor households the hardest. France's European partners are worried that a possible Le Pen presidency could undermine Western unity as the U.S. and Europe seek to support Ukraine and end Russia's ruinous war on its neighbor.

Asked about military aid to Ukraine, Le Pen said she would continue defense and intelligence support. "(But) I'm more reserved about direct arms deliveries. Why? Because ... the line is thin between aid and becoming a co-belligerent," the far-right leader said, citing concerns about an "escalation of this conflict that could bring a whole number of countries into a military commitment."

Earlier Wednesday, French government spokesman Gabriel Attal said France had sent 100 million euros (\$109 million) worth of weapons to Ukraine in recent weeks as part of a flow of Western arms.

Earlier in his term, Macron had tried to reach out to Russian President Vladimir Putin to improve Russia's relations with the West, and Macron met with Putin weeks before the Russian invasion in an unsuccessful effort to prevent it. Since then, however, France has supported EU sanctions against Moscow and has offered sustained support to Ukraine.

Le Pen also said France should strike a more independent path from the U.S.-led NATO military alliance.

And despite the atrocities that Russian troops have committed in Ukraine, Le Pen said that NATO should seek a "strategic rapprochement" with Russia once the war is over. Such a relationship would be "in the interest of France and Europe and I think even of the United States," she said, to stop Russia from forging a stronger alliance with world power China.

She did not directly address the horrors unfolding in Ukraine.

Le Pen was speaking at a press conference Wednesday to lay out her foreign policy plans, which include halting aid to African countries unless they take back "undesirable" migrants seeking entry to France. She also wants to slash support for international efforts to improve women's reproductive health in poor countries, increase minority rights or solve environmental problems.

At the end of the event, protesters held up a poster showing a 2017 meeting between Le Pen and Putin. One activist was pulled out of the room. Anti-racism protesters also held a small demonstration outside.

"The election of Madame Le Pen would mean electing an admirer of Putin's regime, an autocratic regime and an admirer of Putin's imperialistic logic," said Dominique Sopo, head of the group SOS Racism. "It would mean that France would become a vassal to Putin's Russia."

Chemical weapons use from Syrian war stokes Ukraine's fears

By ZEINA KARAM Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The chilling scenes from Syria of victims twitching and gasping for air after chlorine cylinders were dropped from helicopters in towns and villages were broadcast over and over in the course of country's civil war.

Legal and moral taboos were shattered. Hundreds were killed, including many children, in dozens of

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poison gas attacks widely blamed on President Bashar Assad's forces under the protection of his chief ally, Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Several years later, concerns are growing that such weapons could be used in Ukraine, where Russian forces have been waging a devastating war for weeks.

As the conflict drags on, Western officials and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy have warned that Putin could deploy chemical agents.

"The world must react now," Zelenskyy said.

Officials say they are investigating an unconfirmed claim by a far-right Ukrainian regiment that a poisonous substance was dropped in the besieged city of Mariupol this week. The claim could not be confirmed by independent sources, and Ukrainian officials say it could have been phosphorus munitions - which cause horrendous burns but are not classed as chemical weapons.

LOWERING THE THRESHOLD

Putin has threatened to broaden the Ukraine war into a nuclear conflict, but it is unclear if chemical agents will be used to support his military operations. Analysts say the Syria war set a horrific precedent in terms of deploying chlorine, sulfur and the nerve agent sarin, completely disregarding international norms and with no accountability.

"From what we're seeing now, it seems that Russia has drawn the conclusion that it's safe to continue this modus operandi from Syria in the Ukrainian context as well," said Aida Samani, legal adviser with Civil Rights Defenders, a Sweden-based group.

"Of course, that undermines the international regulations that we have in place and lowers the threshold for the use of such weapons," Samani added.

She has joined with other nongovernmental organizations to file a criminal complaint on behalf of a group of Syrians living in Sweden against the Syrian government for war crimes and crimes against humanity related to its use of chemical weapons.

Western officials say Russia may be looking to borrow from the Syria playbook, where Assad's forces tested the international community's resolve by gradually ramping up the brutality of attacks and methods.

Part of the equation in Syria was the difficulty of proving anything in the aftermath of such attacks, largely due to the lack of immediate access. Assad, with Russia's backing, consistently cast a cloud of confusion, accusing the opposition of fabricating evidence or deploying poison gas themselves to try to frame him.

An investigative mechanism set up by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons blamed Syrian government forces for multiple chemical attacks in Syria, including the use of chlorine and sarin in an attack on the town of Khan Sheikhoun in April 2017 that killed about 100 people. At least one mustard gas attack was blamed on the Islamic State group, which held territory in Syria and Iraq for several years during the war that killed half a million people.

In comments reminiscent of Syria, Russia accused Ukraine of running chemical and biological labs with U.S. support, leading to accusations Moscow was seeking to stage a false-flag incident. Ukraine does have a network of biological labs that have gotten funding and research support from the U.S. — but they are part of a program seeking to reduce the likelihood of deadly outbreaks by pathogens, whether natural or manmade. The U.S. efforts date to the 1990s to dismantle the former Soviet Union's program for weapons of mass destruction.

RED LINES

The assault early on the morning of Aug. 21, 2013, on the rebel-held suburbs of Damascus known as Ghouta shocked a world that had grown largely numb to the carnage of Syria's civil war.

Fueling the international outrage were dozens of online videos showing victims in spasms, gasping for breath and foaming at the mouth. The attack crossed what then-U.S. President Barack Obama had called a "red line" for possible military intervention in the Arab country.

Obama came close to ordering U.S.-led military strikes but abruptly backed down after failing to secure the necessary support from the U.S. Congress and instead struck a deal with Moscow to eliminate Syria's chemical arsenal.

By August 2014, Assad's government declared that the destruction of its chemical weapons was com-

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pleted. But Syria's initial declaration to the OPCW has remained in dispute, and the attacks continued.

In 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump launched several dozen cruise missiles at a Syrian air base in retaliation for a suspected nerve gas attack on the town of Khan Sheikhoun in rebel-held Idlib province that killed about 100 people. Experts from the U.N. and the chemical weapons watchdog blamed the Syrian government for the attack.

As Moscow pushes its offensive in Ukraine, world leaders and policymakers are grappling with how the West should respond to a Russian battlefield use of chemical or biological weapons. Members of Congress said the Biden administration and its allies will not stand by if that happens.

Unlike Syria, however, Russia is a nuclear power. Any reaction risks triggering a nuclear confrontation, which Putin has already alluded to.

ACHIEVING JUSTICE

Samani, of Civil Rights Defenders, faults the international community for not making a real effort to seek accountability for the chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

"There hasn't really been any political appetite to explore how, for example, a special tribunal could be set up for Syria," she said.

Last week, she and a group of NGOs presented new information relevant to the sarin gas attacks on Khan Sheikhoun in 2017 and Ghouta in 2013 to investigative authorities in Germany, France and Sweden.

But justice appears to be a long way off.

"Holding the perpetrators of these crimes accountable for the use of illegal weapons is the first deterrent to ensure that they do not recur," said Haneen Haddad, project leader for the Syrian Archive, a Syrian-led project that documents human rights violations and other crimes committed in Syria.

"Without meaningful accountability, cruel actors and their enablers think that they can do terrible things without real consequence from the international community."

East African oil pipeline hits the headwinds

By WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

MOMBASA, Kenya (AP) — Climate activists — including influential campaigners Vanessa Nakate and Hilda Nakabuye — are urging more banks and insurers not to back the controversial \$5 billion East African Crude Oil Pipeline that is primed to transport oil from the Hoima oilfields in Uganda to the Tanzanian coastal city of Tanga.

"The climate crisis is affecting many people in Africa," Nakate said at an event on Wednesday, dubbed the Africa's people's annual general meeting. "There is no future in the fossil fuel industry which has done more harm than good in much of Africa. We cannot eat oil nor drink oil."

The growing pressure mounted by environmental groups, under the banner #StopEACOP, has led to a growing list of banks and insurers quitting the oil pipeline project. Just this week the project suffered another major setback after insurer Allianz Group pulled out of the project. It joins 15 banks and seven insurance companies — including HSBC, BNP Paribas and Swiss Re — who have denied financially backing the pipeline in response to the campaign waged by numerous environmental organizations, led by the international group 350.org.

The 897-mile (1,443 kilometer) oil pipeline is billed as the longest heated pipeline in the world. The China National Oil Corporation and French energy conglomerate TotalEnergies, alongside the Uganda National Oil Company and the Tanzania Petroleum Development Cooperation, have remained firm in pushing ahead with the pipeline project which is expected to start transporting oil in 2025.

Construction of the pipeline will displace thousands of families and threaten water resources in the Lake Victoria and River Nile basins, according to 350.org. The environmental group goes on to say that the crude pipeline will generate some 37 million tons (34 million metric tonnes) of carbon dioxide emissions annually, fueling climate change.

"TotalEnergies is putting profits over people and it shows. Communities in Uganda and Tanzania have been fighting tirelessly against the planned pipeline and the trail of destruction it is already leaving in its wake," Omar Elmawi, the coordinator of the #StopEACOP campaign, said. "At a time when scientists call

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for the phasing out of fossil fuel projects, to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, it is ill-advised and irresponsible to go ahead with this project, while ignoring the cries of those most affected.”

Environmental activist Hilda Nakabuye added that the pipeline would mostly negatively affect women and children through spillage, pollution and displacement along the proposed route. Climate campaigners have also filed a case against the pipeline at the regional East African Court of Justice that sits in Arusha, Tanzania.

TotalEnergies has defended the pipeline noting that it adheres to strict Ugandan and Tanzanian environmental laws. An environmental social impact assessment report conducted by the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment raised concerns about significant risks posed to wildlife notably chimpanzees in the Bugoma, Wambabya and Taala forest reserves.

Initially priced at \$3.5 billion, the underground electrically heated pipeline will now cost \$5 billion and is expected to start near Lake Albert in Hoima District, western Uganda. It will skirt around Lake Victoria entering northern Tanzania on its way to Chongoleani peninsula on the Indian Ocean transporting 216,000 barrels of crude oil per day.

The pipeline is expected to displace over 14,000 households in Uganda and Tanzania, according to the international poverty charity Oxfam. But proponents of the project are citing a \$2 billion annual revenue from the oil exports alongside some 12,000 direct jobs in its defense. Supporters say it will also encourage development on the continent.

“Africa needs cheap stable power as that afforded by oil and coal to grow its manufacturing sector,” Johnson Nderi, a financial analyst in Nairobi who supports the oil pipeline, said.

British firm Tullow Oil first discovered oil in the Lake Albert Basin in 2006, with recoverable oil estimates pegged at 1.2 billion barrels. In 2020, Tullow sold its entire stake to Total Energies. In early February, the oil pipeline’s major backers, led by Total Energies, announced the conclusion of the Financial Investment Decision, signaling the commencement of the construction of the oil pipeline.

Finland, Sweden move ahead toward possible NATO membership

By JARI TANNER Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — European Union nations Finland and Sweden reached important stages Wednesday on their way to possible NATO membership as the Finnish government issued a security report to lawmakers and Sweden’s ruling party initiated a review of security policy options.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 triggered a surge in support for joining NATO in the two traditionally militarily non-aligned Nordic countries, with polls showing a majority of respondents willing to join the alliance in Finland and supporters of NATO in Sweden clearly outnumbering those against the idea.

Finland, a country of 5.5 million, shares the EU’s longest border with Russia, a 1,340-kilometer (833-mile) frontier. Sweden has no border with Russia.

Russia, for its part, has warned Sweden and Finland against joining NATO, with officials saying it would not contribute to stability in Europe. Officials said Russia would respond to such a move with retaliatory measures that would cause “military and political consequences” for Helsinki and Stockholm. One of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s reasons for invading Ukraine was that the country refused to promise that it would not join NATO.

Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin, speaking Wednesday in Stockholm in a joint news conference with her Swedish counterpart Magdalena Andersson, said Finland is ready to make a decision on NATO “within weeks” rather than months following an extensive debate in the 200-seat Eduskunta legislature.

Marin stressed that Finland and Sweden, two neighboring Nordic countries which have close economic, political and military ties, will make independent decisions regarding their security policy arrangements, including whether to join NATO.

“But we do that with a clear understanding that our choices will affect not only ourselves but our neighbors as well,” Marin said, adding that she would prefer seeing both Finland and Sweden becoming NATO members.

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Andersson said Sweden and Finland would maintain “a very close dialogue and have a very straight-forward and honest discussions” in the coming weeks over their countries respective choices on NATO.

The only real option to NATO membership could be an enhanced bilateral military cooperation added with the United States and Nordic NATO member Norway, Finnish experts have said.

Marin and Andersson lead the ruling Social Democratic Parties in their respective countries. The parties are expected to announce their NATO views in early and late May, respectively. Parliaments in both countries are ready to finally decide the matter — something that could happen in Finland in late May and a bit later in Sweden.

Complicating things in Sweden is the general election in September, which is likely to be dominated by the NATO issue.

In Finland, President Sauli Niinisto said he was convinced that his country’s decision on NATO will be ready well ahead of NATO’s June 29-30 summit in Madrid, Spain.

On Wednesday, the Finnish government issued a much-awaited report on changes in Finland’s security environment that lawmakers will start debating after the Easter break. The report addresses the pros and cons of Finland’s possible membership in NATO, focusing on supply threats, economic effects, cybersecurity and hybrid threats.

“The war started by Russia endangers security and stability in entire Europe,” Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto said as he presented the report. “Russia’s attack on Ukraine will have a long-lasting impact on our own security environment. Trust in Russia has plummeted.”

Andersson said Wednesday that the Swedish government is working on a security environment analysis together with all parties in the 349-seat Riksdag legislature. She said the report is due May 31 but could be finished earlier. In addition, Andersson’s Social Democratic Party has initiated its own separate review of Sweden’s security environment.

‘It can’t be fixed:’ In shattered Irpin, signs of homecoming

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

IRPIN, Ukraine (AP) — Pounding sounds came from a sixth-floor window, along with the risk of falling glass. For once, it was not destruction in the Ukrainian town of Irpin, but rebuilding. Heartened by Russia’s withdrawal from the capital region, residents have begun coming home, at least to what’s left.

Irpin just weeks ago saw desperate scenes of flight. Terrified residents picked their way across slippery planks of a makeshift bridge after a concrete span was destroyed by Ukrainian forces to slow the Russian advance. But on Monday, a long line of cars waited to cross a recently improvised bridge allowing access between the town and the capital, Kyiv.

The early returnees are among the 7 million Ukrainians displaced inside their country by the war. They are crossing paths with the elderly and others who waited out Russia’s assault in cold, damp basements, numbed by the sounds of shelling, and who have emerged into a landscape of ruined tanks and splintered homes.

In colorful Irpin apartment blocks where cafes and salons are still silent, the first signs of life stir amid the shattered glass and scorched walls. It feels like a turning point, even as police officers with flashlights continue to walk through near-empty buildings, looking for bodies and mines.

The Russians left messages in some apartments, according to photos posted in one building’s social media group and shared with The Associated Press. “Hello from the Russians,” read one taunting note written on a piece of paper. “We didn’t want to, you started the war yourself. Sorry if something is wrong :)”

Another message, left in a child’s bedroom, said, “I fed your fish, princess.” The fish are still alive.

Tenant chat groups now full of questions for Irpin’s returnees about the state of their homes.

Upstairs and down a darkened hallway, Olexiy Planida, 34, worked to place a sheet of plastic over a large window facing a damaged playground. This was his first time home since he fled with his wife, two small children and their dog.

The remains of breakfast, including a half-eaten bowl on a high chair, were where they left them. Nearby,

pots of flowers had wilted. A stuffed toy lay amid broken glass.

"It hurts," Planida said. The Russians broke open all the apartment doors and took a laptop, iPad and jewelry, he said. He's sure it was the Russians because local thieves pick the locks instead.

"I think for a couple of years it can't be fixed," Planida said of Irpin's homes, many of which have suffered similar damage or worse.

He hopes his children, ages 2 and 4, will never see their home the way it is now. He hopes they'll never remember the war itself, which he and his wife have tried to explain in the gentlest of terms.

"We're just talking to them like, 'Hey, some bad guys came to us,'" he said. "They shouldn't see such things." Even he was shocked by the ruins in parts of Irpin and in Bucha nearby.

Down the hallway, Oksana Lyul'ka cleared the broken glass from her living room floor, using work gloves to carry pieces as large as dinner plates.

Just months ago the 28-year-old had returned to Ukraine from Cyprus to start a new life closer to home, and she renovated the apartment. Now the structural damage alone is a concern, along with her missing jewelry.

She had arrived at the apartment an hour earlier. Downstairs, she cried.

She fled Irpin on the second day of the war and moved in with her parents. Now she is based in Kyiv, not so far away.

"We can't make plans for now," she said. "Our plan is to win the war, and then we will decide what to do with the apartment. It's not that important now."

Because the Russians remain in Ukraine they complicate any real recovery, she said. "We all feel pain and it's hard and it's terrible, but people are suffering, people are dying, and this is the main problem."

Near the slowly reviving bridge linking Irpin to the capital, dozens of cars abandoned by fleeing residents were being placed in rows. Some were burned. Some were smashed.

Some vehicles had the remnants of their owners' last seconds before giving up and going on foot: a coffee thermos. Face masks. Glove compartments left open, documents scattered.

People have started showing up at the lot to look for what they left behind.

Not all find it. One man sat on the curb, holding two photographs, and wept. His brother was gone.

Forced into a basement in Ukraine, residents began to die

By OLEKSANDR STASHEVSKYI Associated Press

YAHIDNE, Ukraine (AP) — The Russian soldiers forced more than 300 villagers into a school basement. Then, during weeks of stress and deprivation, some began to die.

Residents of Yahidne, a village 140 kilometers (87 miles) from Kyiv, told The Associated Press about being ordered into the basement at gunpoint after the Russians took control of the area around the northern city of Chernihiv in early March.

In one room, those who survived wrote the names of the 18 who didn't.

"An old man died near me and then his wife died next," Valentyna Saroyan, a weary survivor, recalled Tuesday as she toured the darkened basement. "Then a man died who was lying there, then a woman sitting next to me. She was a heavy woman, and it was very difficult for her."

Village by village, town by town, Ukrainians in areas where Russians have withdrawn continue to unearth new horrors. More are feared.

The residents of Yahidne, which is on the outskirts of Chernihiv, said they were made to remain in the basement day and night except for the rare times when they they were allowed outside to cook on open fires or to use the toilet.

The health of the captives suffered.

"Here's a chair, and that's how we were sitting for a month," Saroyan said, recalling her aching legs.

As people died one by one in the basement, neighbors were allowed from time to time to place the bodies in a mass grave in a nearby cemetery.

Each time, they passed through a doorway marked in dripping red paint with the plaintive words "At-

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tention. Children." The glare of a flashlight shows bright drawings on the walls.

The Russians could be cruel, surviving villages said.

Svitlana Baguta said a Russian soldier who was "either drunk or high" made her drink from a flask at gunpoint.

"He pointed the gun at the throat, put the flask and said, 'Drink,'" Baguta said.

Julia Surypak said the soldiers allowed some people to make a short trip to their homes if they sang the Russian state anthem. "But they didn't allow us to walk much," she said.

The Russian forces left the village at the beginning of April, part of a regional withdrawal from northern Ukraine. Russia's military ordered in anticipation of after a large offensive in the east.

A message scrawled on a wall of the Yahidne school marked April 1 as "the last day" of their presence.

The soldiers left behind unexploded artillery shells, destroyed Russian vehicles and rubble.

Today in History: April 14, Abraham Lincoln is shot

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, April 14, the 104th day of 2022. There are 261 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 14, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln was shot and mortally wounded by John Wilkes Booth during a performance of "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theatre in Washington.

On this date:

In 1828, the first edition of Noah Webster's "American Dictionary of the English Language" was published.

In 1902, James Cash Penney opened his first store, The Golden Rule, in Kemmerer, Wyoming.

In 1912, the British liner RMS Titanic collided with an iceberg in the North Atlantic at 11:40 p.m. ship's time and began sinking. (The ship went under two hours and 40 minutes later with the loss of 1,514 lives.)

In 1910, President William Howard Taft became the first U.S. chief executive to throw the ceremonial first pitch at a baseball game as the Washington Senators beat the Philadelphia Athletics 3-0.

In 1935, the "Black Sunday" dust storm descended upon the central Plains, turning a sunny afternoon into total darkness.

In 1949, the "Wilhelmstrasse Trial" in Nuremberg ended with 19 former Nazi Foreign Office officials sentenced by an American tribunal to prison terms ranging from four to 25 years.

In 1960, Tamla Records and Motown Records, founded by Berry Gordy Jr., were incorporated as Motown Record Corp.

In 1981, the first test flight of America's first operational space shuttle, the Columbia, ended successfully with a landing at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

In 1994, two U.S. Air Force F-15 warplanes mistakenly shot down two U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopters over northern Iraq, killing 26 people, including 15 Americans.

In 1999, NATO mistakenly bombed a convoy of ethnic Albanian refugees; Yugoslav officials said 75 people were killed.

In 2007, riot police beat and detained protesters as thousands defied an official ban and attempted to stage a rally in Moscow against Russian President Vladimir Putin's government.

In 2020, President Donald Trump announced that he was cutting off U.S. payments to the U.N. health agency, the World Health Organization; Trump said it had not done enough to stop the coronavirus from spreading.

Ten years ago: In Belfast, Northern Ireland, where the RMS Titanic was built, thousands attended a choral requiem at the Anglican St. Anne's Cathedral or a nationally televised concert at the city's Waterfront Hall to mark the 100th anniversary of the ship's sinking. Eleven Secret Service agents were placed on administrative leave as a deepening scandal involving prostitutes overshadowed President Barack Obama's diplomatic mission to Latin America.

Five years ago: Former NFL star Aaron Hernandez, already serving a life sentence for a 2013 murder,

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was acquitted in Boston in a 2012 double slaying prosecutors said was fueled by his anger over a drink spilled at a nightclub. (Five days later, Hernandez hanged himself in his prison cell.)

One year ago: A white former suburban Minneapolis police officer, Kim Potter, was charged with second-degree manslaughter for killing 20-year-old Black motorist Daunte Wright in a shooting that ignited days of unrest. (Potter, who said she confused her handgun for her Taser, was convicted of first- and second-degree manslaughter and sentenced to two years in prison.) President Joe Biden said he would withdraw the 2,500 remaining U.S. troops from Afghanistan, with the drawdown to begin by May 1; that date had been the deadline for full withdrawal under a peace agreement that the Trump administration reached with the Taliban in 2020. Bernard Madoff, the infamous architect of an epic securities swindle, died at a federal prison in North Carolina; he was 82. Carlos Rodón threw the second no-hitter of the young baseball season, losing his bid for a perfect game on a hit batter with one out in the ninth inning, and the Chicago White Sox cruised to an 8-0 victory over the Cleveland Indians.

Today's Birthdays: Country singer Loretta Lynn is 90. Actor Julie Christie is 82. Retired MLB All-Star Pete Rose is 81. Rock musician Ritchie Blackmore is 77. Actor John Shea is 74. Actor Peter Capaldi is 64. Actor-turned-race car driver Brian Forster is 62. Actor Brad Garrett is 62. Actor Robert Carlyle is 61. Rock singer-musician John Bell (Widespread Panic) is 60. Actor Robert Clendenin is 58. Actor Catherine Dent is 57. Actor Lloyd Owen is 56. Baseball Hall of Famer Greg Maddux is 56. Rock musician Barrett Martin is 55. Actor Anthony Michael Hall is 54. Actor Adrien Brody is 49. Classical singer David Miller (Il Divo) is 49. Rapper Da Brat is 48. Actor Antwon Tanner is 47. Actor Sarah Michelle Gellar is 45. Actor-producer Rob McElhenney is 45. Roots singer JD McPherson is 45. Rock singer Win Butler (Arcade Fire) is 42. Actor Claire Coffee is 42. Actor Christian Alexander is 32. Actor Nick Krause is 30. Actor Vivien Cardone is 29. Actor Graham Phillips is 29. Actor Skyler Samuels is 28. Actor Abigail Breslin is 26.