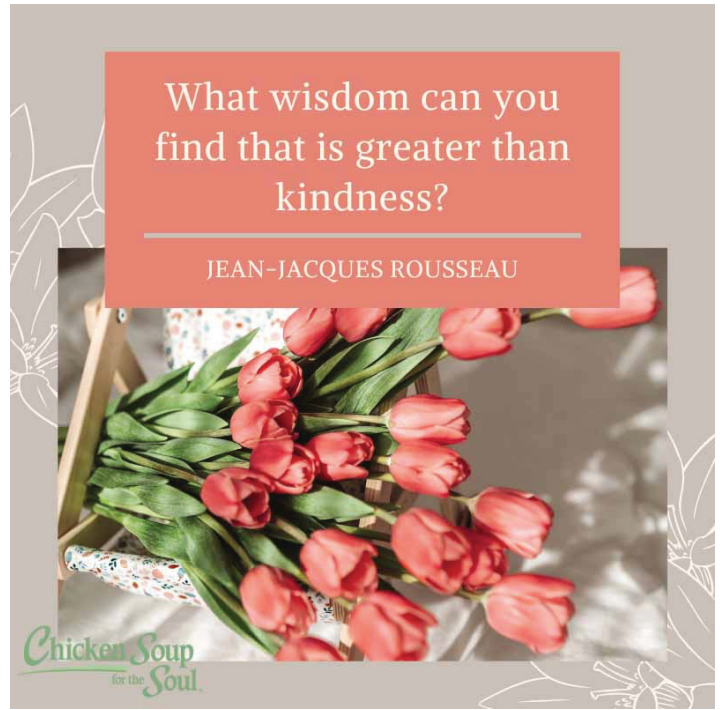


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UpComing Events

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

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.

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.uslbm.com/careers and search for jobs in Britton, SD.

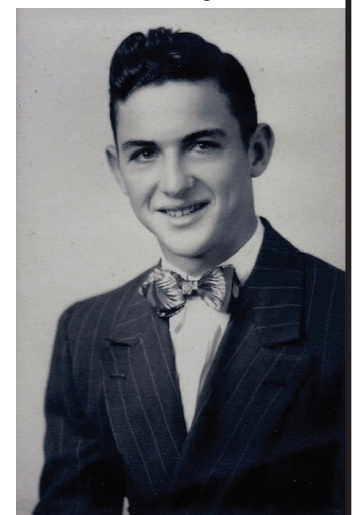
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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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90th Birthday



It took Les Dohman 90 years to look this good. Card party for his birthday on April 16, 2022-send card to Les Dohman PO Box 517 Groton SD 57445

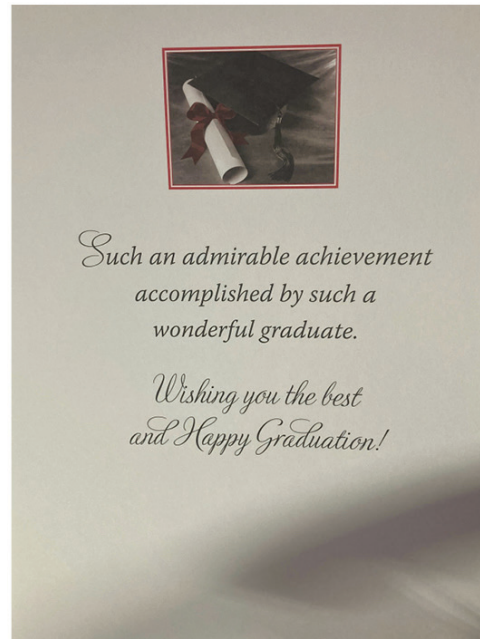
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Jumbo Graduation Cards

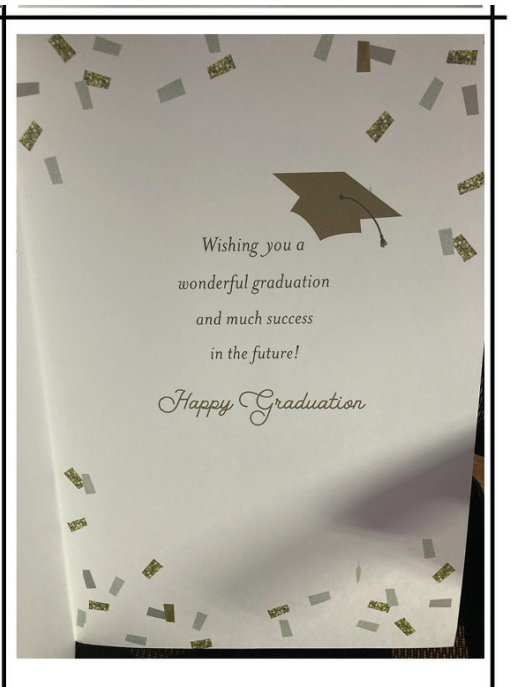
Only \$7.99 each ~ Card Size: 16.25" x 24"

Can now be ordered on-line at 397news.com - Link on Black Bar
Or Call/Text Paul at 605-397-7460 or Tina at 605-397-7285
to reserve your card(s)



50-9903-C
\$7.99

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\$7.99



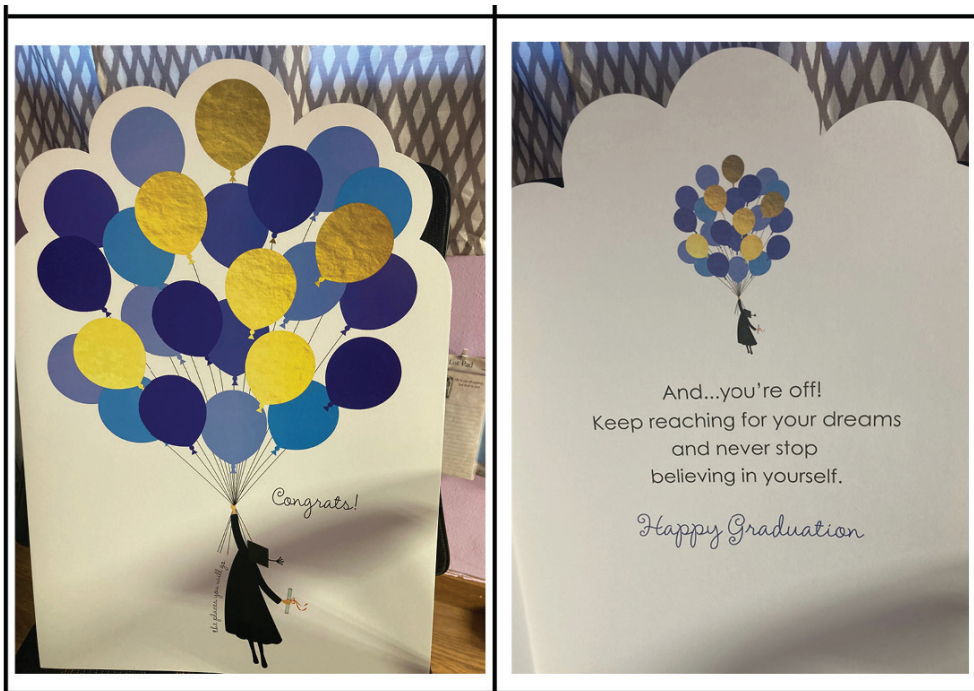
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Jumbo Graduation Cards

Only \$7.99 each ~ Card Size: 16.25" x 24"

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to reserve your card(s)



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2022 Avian Influenza in the United States - What you need to know!

To date, USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratories has confirmed the presence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in commercial and backyard flocks in several states including South Dakota. Avian influenza viruses are classified as either "low pathogenic (LPAI)" or "highly pathogenic (HPAI)" based on their genetic features and the severity of the disease they cause in poultry. Caused by an influenza type A virus, HPAI can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and wild birds (especially waterfowl).

The clinical signs of birds affected with all forms of Avian Influenza may show one or more of the following:

- Sudden death without clinical signs
- Decreased water consumption up to 72 hours before other clinical signs
- Lack of energy and appetite
- Decreased egg production
- Soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles, and hocks
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, combs, and legs
- Nasal discharge
- Coughing, sneezing
- Lack of coordination
- Diarrhea

In addition to the disease infecting domestic birds, it is important to know that wild birds can also be infected and show no signs of illness. They can carry the disease to new areas when migrating, potentially exposing domestic poultry to the virus. The APHIS' wild bird surveillance program provides an early warning system for the introduction and distribution of avian influenza viruses of concern in the United States, allowing APHIS and the poultry industry to take timely and rapid action.

With the recent detections of avian influenza in wild birds and domestic poultry in the United States, bird owners should review their biosecurity practices and stay vigilant to protect poultry and pet birds from transmission of this disease. The following bio-safety guidelines are effective methods for safeguarding commercial operations and smaller flocks:

- Backyard flock owners should practice strict biosecurity, including preventing birds from exposure and/or co-mingling with wild birds and other types of poultry.
 - Shower, change clothes, and clean and disinfect footwear before entering your poultry housing areas.
 - Respiratory protection such as a medical facemask would also be important and remember to always wear clean clothes when encountering healthy domestic birds.
 - Carefully follow safe entry and exit procedures into your flock's clean area.
 - Reduce the attractiveness for wild birds to stop at your place by cleaning up litter and spilled feed around poultry housing areas.
 - If you have free range guinea fowl and waterfowl, consider bringing them into coops or flight pens under nets to prevent interaction of domesticated poultry with wild birds and their droppings.
 - It is best to restrict visitors from interacting with your birds currently.
 - Do not touch sick or dead wildlife and keep them away from domestic poultry
 - Try not to handle sick or deceased domestic birds (if you must, use proper personal protective equipment to minimize direct contact and cautiously disinfect anything that comes into contact with the deceased and or sick bird).

As part of the existing USDA Avian Influenza response plans, Federal and State partners as well as

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industry are responding quickly and decisively to these outbreaks by following these five basic steps:

- **Quarantine** – restricting movement of poultry and poultry-moving equipment into and out of the control area;
- **Eradicate** – depopulate the affected flock(s);
- **Monitor region** – testing wild and domestic birds in a broad area around the quarantine area;
- **Disinfect** – kills the virus in the affected flock locations; and
- **Test** – confirming that the poultry farm is AI virus-free.

Sick or deceased domestic birds should be reported to your local veterinarian. Positive domestic cases are handled by APHIS and its partners. States that have confirmed cases of Avian Influenza should work closely with USDA-APHIS on surveillance, reporting and control efforts. Disposal methods will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis depending on a variety of factors, including the size of the flock, space requirements, associated costs, local conditions, and applicable laws/regulations.

The United States has the strongest Avian Influenza surveillance program in the world, where we actively look for the disease and provide fair market value compensation to affected producers to encourage reporting.

If you do not raise domestic birds or have a poultry operation but you encounter sick or dead wild birds, please use bio-safety measures, and report your findings through USDA's toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, this strain of Avian Influenza is a low risk to the public. While the transmission rate from animals to humans is low, it is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can be shared between species. To learn more about Avian Influenza and to remain up to date on the latest related news and information, you can visit the [USDAAPHIS webpage](#).

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**

Funding available for furnace repair or replacement

PIERRE – A program helping South Dakotans who own their home afford the repair or replacement of their furnace has more funding available and eligible low-income households in need are encouraged to apply.

An additional \$1 million in one-time funding has been added to the Energy Assistance program for furnace repair and replacement through the American Rescue Plan Act, doubling its size. Repair and replacement for air conditioners has also been added for this year only and is available until September 30, 2022.

“For low-income families in South Dakota, unexpected costs due to a furnace or air conditioner that is not functioning properly can be a struggle,” said Department of Social Services (DSS) Cabinet Secretary Laurie Gill. “By putting additional funding into this program, we can help ensure families will have reliable and efficient systems when they need them.”

Eligibility for repair or replacement is based on income for households whose furnace or air conditioner is not working or not working properly.

Four Community Action Programs administer the program for DSS and cover every county in the state:

- Inter-Lakes Community Action – Ph: 605-256-6518 (www.interlakescap.com) serves Brookings, Clark, Codington, Deuel, Grant, Hamlin, Kingsbury, Lake, McCook, Miner, Minnehaha, and Moody counties.

- Grow South Dakota - Ph: 605-698-7654 (<https://www.growsd.org/>) serves Beadle, Brown, Campbell, Day, Edmunds, Faulk, Hand, Hughes, Hyde, McPherson, Marshall, Potter, Roberts, Spink, Stanley, Sully, and Walworth counties.

- Rural Office of Community Services - Ph: 605-384-3883 (www.rocsinc.org) serves Aurora, Bon Homme, Brule, Buffalo, Charles Mix, Clay, Davison, Douglas, Gregory, Hanson, Hutchinson, Jerauld, Jones, Lincoln, Lyman, Mellette, Sanborn, Todd, Tripp, Turner, Yankton, and Union counties.

- Western South Dakota Community Action - Ph: 605-348-1460 (www.wsdca.org) serves Bennett, Butte, Corson, Custer, Dewey, Fall River, Haakon, Harding, Jackson, Lawrence, Meade, Perkins, Oglala Lakota, Pennington, and Ziebach counties.

DSS also provides energy assistance to help low-income South Dakotans pay for home heating costs. Eligibility and assistance amounts are based on the number of people, income of everyone in the home, type and cost of heating, and location. Applications may be submitted any time for the upcoming winter. Assistance for eligible households that have outstanding heating costs for this past winter may be available if they apply by April 30.

For more information on Energy Assistance and Weatherization Assistance including furnace repair and replacement, visit <https://dss.sd.gov/economicassistance/energyassistance/> or your local Community Action Agency at <https://dss.sd.gov/economicassistance/communityassistance.aspx>.

Signal Work Planned on U.S. Highway 12 in Webster

WEBSTER, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) will begin signal work at the intersection of U.S. Highway 12 and S.D. Highway 25 in Webster on Thursday, April 21, 2022.

Signal work is anticipated to occur between 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Construction should be completed in approximately one day.

During this time, the traffic signals will be turned off. Northbound and southbound traffic will be stopped at the intersection with stop signs in use during construction. Eastbound and westbound traffic will be unimpeded during construction.

Motorists should be prepared for suddenly slowing and stopped traffic and be aware of construction equipment and workers adjacent to the roadway.

The contractor on this project is Muth Electric, of Mitchell, South Dakota.

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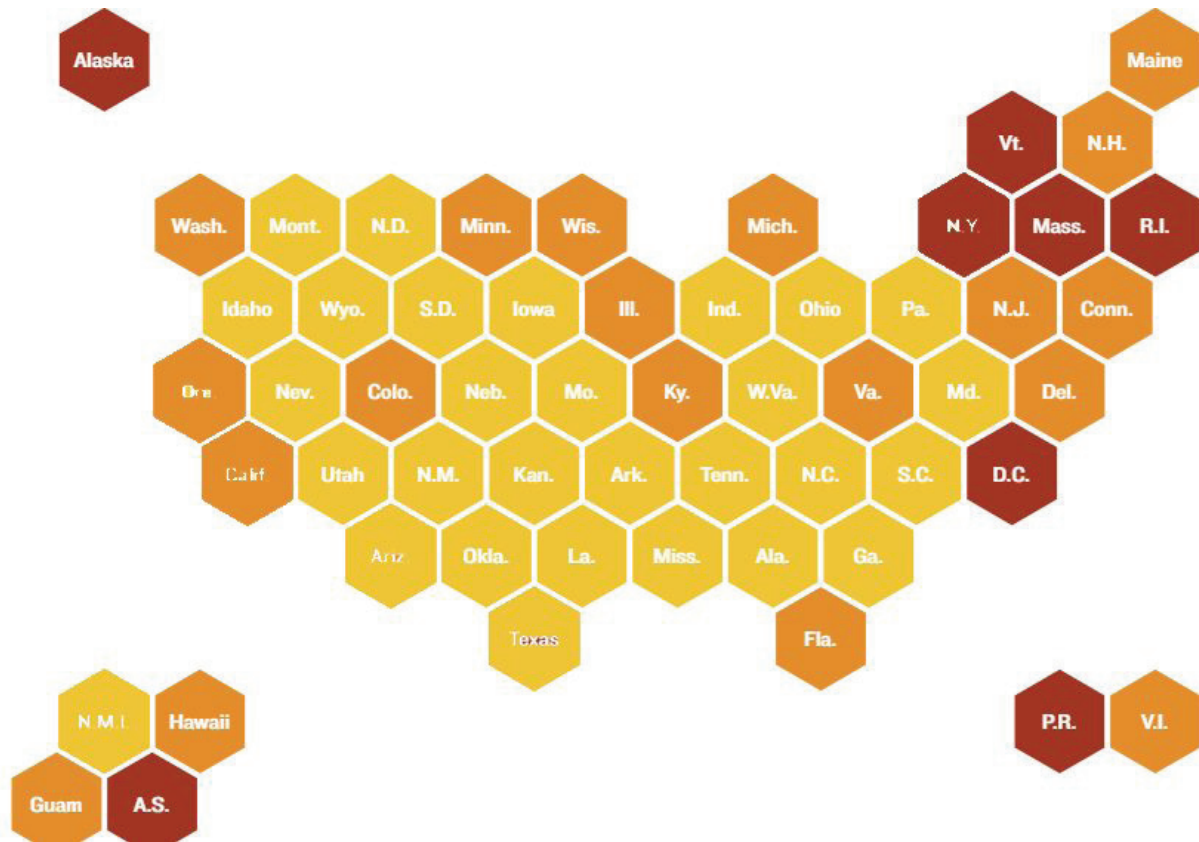
promo code
N7017

CALL 1-833-581-1380

*Prices are per person based on double occupancy plus up to \$299 in taxes & fees. Single supplement and seasonal surcharges may apply. Add-on airfare available. Free date changes prior to final payment. Deposits and final payments are non-refundable. Onboard Credit requires purchase of Ocean View or Balcony Cabin. Offers apply to new bookings only, made by 6/30/22. Other terms & conditions may apply. Ask your Travel Consultant for details.

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COVID-19 UPDATE by Marie Miller

Worser and worser.

A couple of bright spots: The Northern Marianas finally dropped out of red, and when they did, they dropped all the way to yellow. You will recall that small populations can show rather large per capita changes quite quickly. Also Colorado dropped from red to orange. And Texas dropped from orange to yellow.

Now for the bad news, and plenty of it: Moving into red are New York, Massachusetts, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Moving into orange are Oregon, California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Florida.

Likely near-future moves are Alaska, which is declining rapidly and at the bottom of red, and Kentucky, which is declining and at the bottom of orange. Likely to move up soon are Colorado (looks like today's move may reverse itself fairly soon), New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the US Virgin Islands.

Thirty-five of the 56 states and territories we're tracking show increasing new-case numbers. Four of those are over 100 percent increases, and another 16 are over 50 percent. Raw number new-case counts have been back over 50,000 the past couple of days. Looks like the place is on fire again.

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Access HBO Max only through HBO Max app or hbomax.com. HBO Max also includes HBO channels and On Demand on DIRECTV. Online account registration required. Data rates may apply for app download/usage. EARLY TERMINATION FEE OF \$20/MO. FOR EACH MONTH REMAINING ON AGMT., \$19.95 ACTIVATION, EQUIPMENT NON-RETURN & ADD'L FEES APPLY. New approved residential customers only (equipment lease req'd). Credit card req'd (except MA & PA). [See offer details]

Contact your local DIRECTV dealer!

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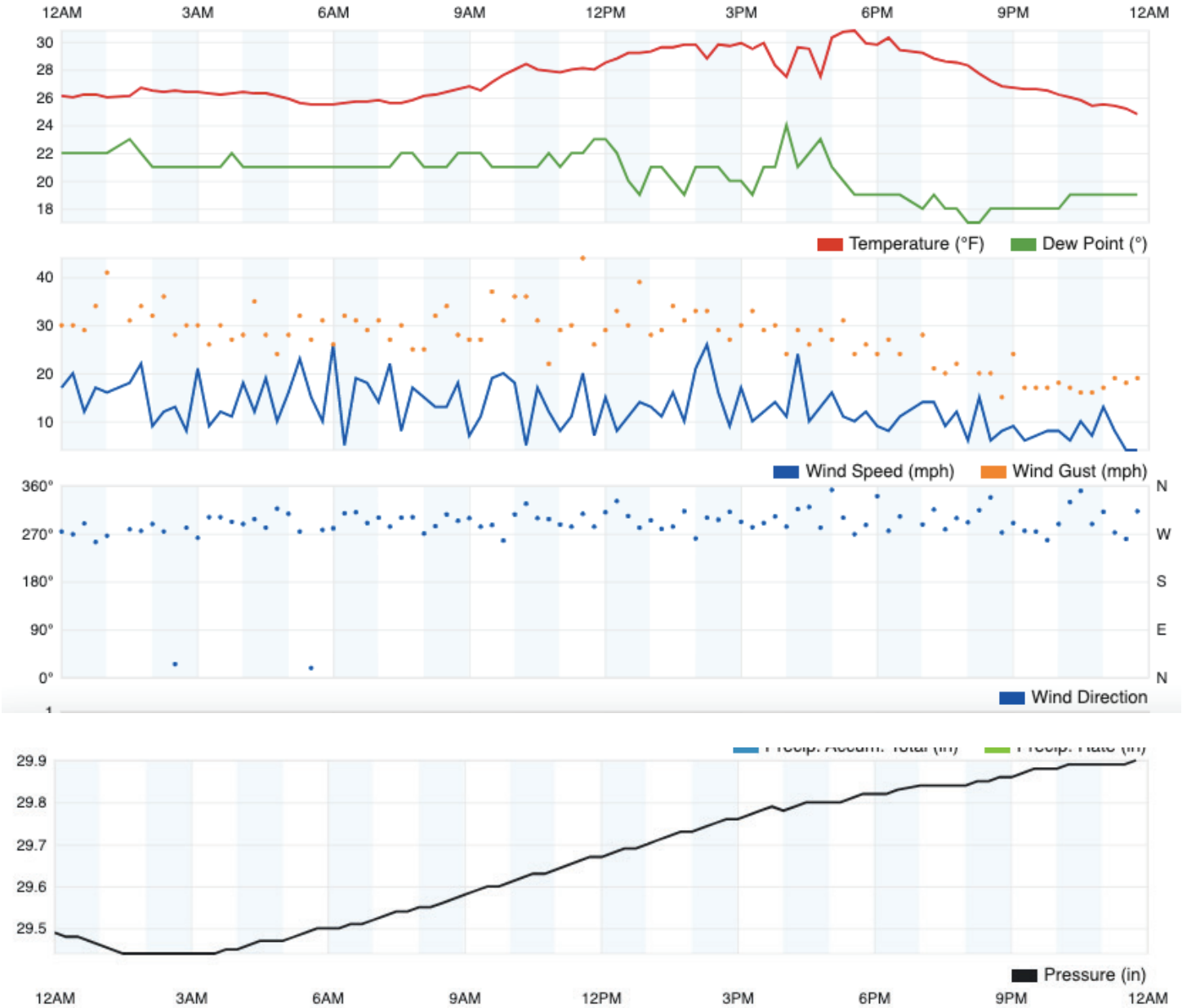


1-YR BASE PACKAGE: Ends 6/30/22. Available only in the U.S. (excludes Puerto Rico and U.S.V.I.). Pricing: \$79.99 for first 12 mos. only. After 12 mos. or loss of eligibility, then prevailing rate applies (currently \$84.99/mo. for ENTERTAINMENT; \$106.99/mo. for CHOICE; \$136.99/mo. for ULTIMATE; \$191.99/mo. for PREMIER) unless cancelled or changed prior to end of the promo period. Pricing subject to change. TiVo service fee (\$5/mo.) req'd for TiVo HD DVR from DIRECTV. Additional Fees & Taxes: Price excludes Regional Sports Fee of up to \$11.99/mo. (which is extra & applies to CHOICE and/or M S ULTRA and higher Pkgs.), applicable use tax expense surcharge on retail value of installation, custom installation, equipment upgrades/add-ons, and certain other add'l fees & chrgs. See directv.com/directv-fees for additional information. Different offers may apply for eligible multi-dwelling unit and telco customers.
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Mostly Sunny
and Breezy

High: 32 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy
and Blustery
then Partly
Cloudy

Low: 19 °F

Saturday



Sunny

High: 38 °F

Saturday
Night



Partly Cloudy
then Chance
Snow

Low: 25 °F

Sunday



Breezy.
Rain/Snow
Likely then
Rain Likely

High: 44 °F

Chilly Next Several Days

Friday



Breezy

HI: 26 to 39

Saturday



Light Snow
(1-2" Accum)

HI: 33 to 46

LO: Teens

Sunday



HI: 39 to 52

LO: 23 to 32

Monday



Breezy

HI: 34 to 50

LO: Teens

Tuesday



Breezy

HI: 40 to 66

LO: 20 to 31

Updated: 4/15/2022 9:56 AM Central
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
GROTON, SD

'Warmer' range for central SD & 'Colder' temperatures for far northern South Dakota and western Minnesota

Looks chilly and breezy for the next few days. A system Sunday could produce some light snow.

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Today in Weather History

April 15, 1896: A tornado, possibly an F3, moved northeast from Burkmere, which is 10 miles west of Faulkton. About half dozen farms were torn apart. Two children were killed, and the rest of the family critically injured as a home was leveled. 6 miles northwest of Faulkton, near Millard.

April 15, 2011: A strong upper-level low-pressure area brought widespread heavy snowfall to central and parts of northeast South Dakota. This early spring storm brought 6 to 14 inches of heavy snow to the area. The heavy wet snow caused a lot of travel problems along with a few accidents. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included 12 inches 12 SSW Harrold, 23 N Highmore, and Orient; 13 inches 14 NNE Isabel and Eureka with 14 inches at Eagle Butte.

1921 - Two mile high Silver Lake, CO, received 76 inches of snow in 24 hours, the heaviest 24 hour total of record for North America. The storm left a total of 87 inches in twenty-seven and a half hours. (David Ludlum)

1927: The Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927 continued to rage. Tremendous rains all over the Mississippi River Valley during the preceding autumn and winter sent floodwaters raging southward over a wide area. On this date, the government levee at Dorena, MO collapsed. The surge of floodwater continued pushing downriver toward the Mississippi Delta, bursting more dams as it went. Also on this day, New Orleans saw 15 inches of rain in 18 hours. More than 4 feet of water covered parts of the city.

1949 - A hailstone five inches by five and a half inches in size, and weighing four pounds, was measured at Troy NY. (The Weather Channel)

1958 - A tornado 300 yards in width skipped along a five mile path near Frostproof FL. A 2500 gallon water tank was found one mile from its original position (it is not known how much water was in the tank at the time). (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in the Southern Atlantic Coast Region. A tornado killed one person and injured seven others near Mount Dora FL. Drifts of hail up to two feet deep were reported in Davidson and Rowan counties in North Carolina. Myrtle Beach SC was deluged with seven inches of rain in three hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Death Valley, CA, was soaked with 1.53 inches of rain in 24 hours. Snow fell in the mountains of southern California. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms soaked the eastern U.S. with heavy rain, pushing the rainfall total for the month at Cape Hatteras NC past their previous April record of 7.10 inches. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced severe weather from west central Texas to west central Arkansas during the late afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms spawned a tornado which caused more than half a million dollars damage at Fort Stockton TX, produced wind gusts to 65 mph at Dennison TX, produced baseball size hail at Silo OK and near Capps Corner TX, and drenched southeastern Oklahoma with up to 4 inches of rain in two hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1998: An F3 tornado hits downtown Nashville causing extensive damage but no loss of life. An additional 62 tornadoes touched down in Arkansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee. These tornadoes caused 12 fatalities and approximately 120 injuries.

2000: What a difference a day made (with the help of a strong cold front). Yesterday's 86 degrees in Goodland, Kansas, tied the record high for the date. Today's high of 29 degrees was also a date record high, but a record low high. It was a new record by 3 degrees.

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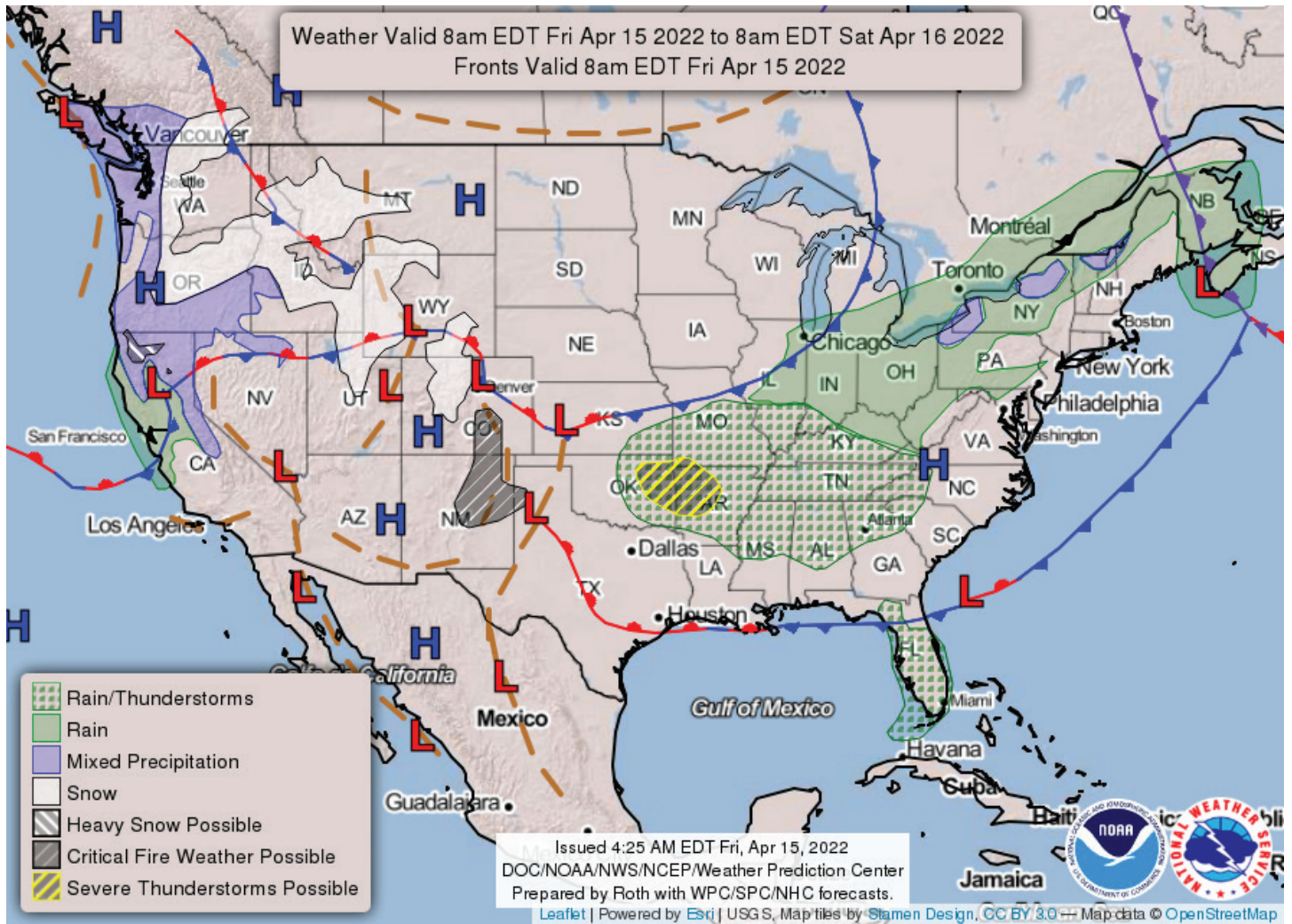
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 31 °F at 5:22 PM
Low Temp: 25 °F at 11:46 PM
Wind: 44 mph at 11:22 AM
Precip: 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 35 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 91 in 1926
Record Low: 8 in 2014
Average High: 58°F
Average Low: 31°F
Average Precip in April.: 0.73
Precip to date in April.: 1.79
Average Precip to date: 2.79
Precip Year to Date: 3.59
Sunset Tonight: 8:19:57 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:43:01 AM



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FINDING SATISFACTION

Satisfaction is an elusive goal. Although it is high on most people's agendas, few ever find it without a struggle. Perhaps it is because most people overlook satisfaction as spiritual need and try to find it in the material things of life.

Satisfaction cannot be found in material things. Those who seek satisfaction from the material world never have "enough" of anything - whether it is money, education, property, or power. "More" does not fill any need. It simply generates the desire for "more."

David addressed this issue in Psalm 131. "Lord," he realized, "my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I don't concern myself with matters that are too great or too awesome for me to grasp." What a remarkable statement: he had the wisdom and insight to "think small."

It is interesting to note that David willingly took a step backward to take a step forward - "my heart is not proud." To move to the "higher ground" in life, we must begin with an attitude of humility. A proud heart comes from thinking of ourselves "more highly than we ought to." But humility, on the other hand, puts us in a place where God can reach us and bless us with the good things He has to offer us.

And notice what he said about being too ambitious: "I'm not going to get involved with matters that are too great or too awesome." He made a conscious decision to focus on what was within his power and potential to achieve. He was willing to be content with the gifts God had for him. And God granted those gifts.

Prayer: Lord, help us to take our eyes off of the "things" of this world and find all that we need in honoring You. Help us to narrow our focus. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: My heart is not proud, LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. Psalm 131:1

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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

Woman killed by falling tree as storms hit Midwest, South

RISON, Ark. (AP) — A 20-year-old Arkansas woman was killed when a tree fell on her home as severe storms swept through the state and a possible tornado ripped roofs off homes in Alabama, officials said.

The woman's death occurred Wednesday as part of a multiday severe weather outbreak that caused tornadoes, powerful winds and huge hail in parts of the central and southern United States.

A weak tornado confirmed by the National Weather Service tore roofs from homes in a public housing community and peppered cars with debris Wednesday night in rural Greene County, Alabama, located about 90 miles (145 kilometers) southwest of Birmingham. Billy Hicks, who lives in the area, told WBMA-TV he was lying down when he heard a rush of wind that lasted only a few seconds.

"I jumped up and put my clothes on, put my shoes on when everything was over with. I come to the side door and looked across the street. I knew that something had hit all these houses," said Hicks, who got in his car to go check on neighbors.

Authorities swarmed the area but didn't find anyone who was hurt, said Zac Bolding of Greene County Emergency Medical Services.

"Most of the people we talked to as we were doing a house-to-house search explained that they were in their bathroom or an interior hallway, so they were listening to those warnings and without that I think we would have been looking at a much different situation," he said.

In Arkansas, the woman was died when a tree toppled on her home in Rison shortly after 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, pinning her to the couch, said Stephen McClellan, Cleveland County's emergency management coordinator. Rison is about 55 miles (90 kilometers) south of Little Rock.

A day earlier, 23 people were injured in the central Texas town of Salado. The National Weather Service in Fort Worth said Wednesday that the twister was rated an EF3 with peak wind speeds of 165 mph (265 kph). On Thursday, Gov. Greg Abbott declared Bell County, where Salado is situated, and nearby Williamson County to hasten state assistance to storm-ravaged areas.

Tornadoes were also reported Tuesday in parts of Iowa and Minnesota. Residents in the small southeastern Minnesota farming community of Taopi were cleaning up after a devastating tornado destroyed half of the town's homes, toppled tall trees and left piles of debris.

A tornado that was rated EF2 with peak wind speeds of 130 mph (209 kph) struck Taopi near the Iowa border late Tuesday night, tearing the roofs off houses, overturning vehicles and bringing down power lines. There were no reports of serious injuries.

Volunteers arrived Wednesday to help residents clean up the debris in the community of about 80 people. Family members sifted through rubble looking for keepsakes.

"Half the town is gone," City Clerk Jim Kiefer said. Of Taopi's 22 homes, at least 10 are beyond repair, with roofs and walls missing, he said. Kiefer said his house is OK, but his mother's home is a total loss.

"She won't be going home," he said.

Also, a blizzard struck North Dakota this week, closing the state Capitol, schools, government offices and some businesses for a third day Thursday.

The National Weather Service's blizzard warning for much of the state and smaller sections of South Dakota and Montana remained in effect Thursday. More than a foot of snow (30 centimeters) has fallen in Bismarck with about 2 feet (61 centimeters) in Dickinson and Glenburn.

"For the month of April it's not uncommon to get the snow. Now, snow of this magnitude — this is something that's a little bit more unique," said Rick Krolak, at the weather service's Bismarck office.

Biden 'cost of carbon' policy survives another legal hurdle

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — In a victory for President Joe Biden, a federal appeals court Thursday refused to

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revisit its March decision reviving administration plans to account for potential damage from greenhouse gas emissions when creating rules for pollution-generating industries.

A Louisiana-based federal judge had blocked the so-called social cost of carbon policy earlier this year, saying it would bring costly regulatory burdens and drive up energy prices. But a panel of three 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals judges in New Orleans unanimously stayed the lower court last month. On Thursday, the appeals court issued a brief order saying none of the court's 17 full-time judges sought a rehearing, which had been requested by Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry.

Landry led the challenge on behalf of Louisiana and nine other states.

"We are disappointed in the 5th Circuit's decision and we will appeal to the Supreme Court," a statement from Landry's office said.

Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Dakota, Texas, West Virginia and Wyoming joined Louisiana in the challenge.

The policy aims to put a dollar value on damage caused by every additional ton of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere. That cost estimate would be used to shape future rules for oil and gas drilling, automobiles, and other industries, and a higher estimate could justify more stringent rules.

On his first day in office, Biden issued an order that restored the cost estimate to about \$51 per ton of carbon dioxide emissions after the Trump administration had reduced the figure to about \$7 or less per ton. Former President Donald Trump's estimate included only damage felt in the U.S. versus the global damage captured in higher estimates that were previously used under the Obama administration.

Republicans and business groups have questioned the accuracy of the complex economic models used to determine the cost estimate. They argue that an emphasis on future climate damage would hobble the economy, particularly the energy industry.

The 5th Circuit panel said in last month's ruling that any regulatory burdens the policy might bring are speculative at this point and that Louisiana and other states challenging the policy therefore had no standing to sue. It said U.S. District Judge James David Cain, a Trump appointee in Louisiana's Western district, had gone "outside the authority of the federal courts" in ordering the Biden administration "to comply with prior administrations' policies on regulatory analysis absent a specific agency action to review."

The ruling panel included judges Leslie Southwick, appointed by Republican President George W. Bush, and James Graves and Gregg Costa, both appointed by Democratic President Barack Obama. Of the 17 full-time judges on the court, 12 were nominated by Republican presidents — six of those by Trump.

Murder charges filed in death of Lincoln County woman

CANTON, S.D. (AP) — A man who has been in custody since a 20-year-old mother was found dead last month in Lincoln County has now been charged with murder and manslaughter.

Randi Gerlach was found dead at a residence south of Sioux Falls on March 1 and sheriff's officials said the death appeared to be suspicious.

Multiple agencies, including the South Dakota Department of Investigation, were called in to investigate the death and to assist in the search for a person of interest, identified as 22-year-old Jackson Phillips, according to the sheriff's office.

He was taken into custody hours later in the Mitchell area following a traffic stop and was transported to the Minnehaha County Jail and booked on initial charges of violating a no contact order in Lincoln County.

Phillips on Wednesday was charged with first-degree murder, second-degree murder, first-degree manslaughter and two counts of aggravated assault in Gerlach's death, the Argus Leader reported.

Lincoln County State's Attorney Tom Wollman said Gerlach, who has a 2-year-old son, and Phillips were in a "domestic relationship."

Wollman said Phillips is being held on a \$50,000 bond. He said it took several weeks for charges to be filed because pending autopsy results.

The defendant's attorney did not immediately return a call for comment.

N. Korea marks key anniversary but no word on army parade

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea on Friday celebrated the milestone birth anniversary of its late founder with a mass dance, fireworks and calls for stronger loyalty to his grandson and current leader Kim Jong Un, but there was no word on an expected military parade amid heightened tensions over its nuclear program.

The 110th birthday of Kim Il Sung comes after North Korea conducted a spate of weapons tests in recent months, including its first full-range intercontinental ballistic missile launch since 2017. Experts say North Korea aims to expand its arsenal and ramp up pressure on the United States while nuclear diplomacy is stalled.

“Let’s work harder in devotion to our respected comrade Kim Jong Un and on that path ultimately realize the dreams of our great president (Kim Il Sung) to build a powerful socialist state,” the North’s state-run website Uriminzokkiri said in a commentary.

Kim Il Sung’s birthday is the most important national holiday in North Korea, where the Kim family has ruled under a strong personality cult since the nation’s founding in 1948. Kim Jong Un became a third-generation leader after his father Kim Jong Il died in late 2011.

Kim Jong Un has pushed to advance his nuclear weapons while simultaneously reviving the economy. But a mix of pandemic border closures, U.S.-led sanctions and his own mismanagement have caused a massive economic blow in what’s become the toughest moment of his decade in power.

On Friday, Pyongyang residents bowed and lay bouquets of flowers near the bronze statues of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il.

State TV later showed thousands of young people — men dressed in Western-style white shirts and women in colorful traditional garb — dancing in a Pyongyang plaza as fireworks launched from a nearby river bank lit up the night sky. The dancers circled a group of performers who held up yellow flowers to form the symbol of the Workers’ Party of Korea — a hammer, brush and sickle.

North Korea often marks key state anniversaries with huge military parades featuring newly built missiles, especially during anniversaries that end in zero and five. Commercial satellites earlier indicated an apparent rehearsal for a military parade, such as people assembled in formation at the Pyongyang plaza, where such events were held in the past.

After North Korea’s ICBM test last month, South Korean and U.S. officials said Pyongyang could soon launch fresh provocations like an additional ICBM test, a rocket to put a spy satellite into orbit, or even a nuclear bomb test that would be the seventh of its kind.

South Korea’s military said recently it detected signs that North Korea is rebuilding tunnels at a nuclear testing ground that it partially dismantled before it entered now-dormant nuclear talks with the United States in 2018.

“I think they’ll carry out a nuclear test once it finishes restoring its nuclear testing facility,” said analyst Moon Seong Mook with the Seoul-based Korea Research Institute for National Strategy. “There is no reason for them to bring back its testing ground if they don’t plan to use them for a bomb test.”

Sung Kim, the top U.S. official on North Korea, is to visit South Korea next week for talks on the international community’s response to the North’s recent missile tests.

North Korea has recently resumed its trademark harsh rhetoric against its rivals. One of its international affairs commentators labeled President Joe Biden as “an old man in senility,” while Kim’s powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong, called South Korea’s defense minister “a scum-like guy” and threatened to annihilate South Korea with nuclear strikes.

UK says Rwanda flights to start in weeks; critics slam plan

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The British government said Friday that it plans to start putting asylum-seekers on one-way flights to Rwanda within weeks, as it defended a deal that has outraged refugee groups and

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humanitarian organizations.

Britain and Rwanda announced Thursday that they had struck an agreement that will see some people arriving in the U.K. as stowaways on trucks or in small boats sent 4,000 miles (6,400 kilometers) to the East African country, where their asylum claims will be processed and, if successful, they will stay.

The British government says the plan will discourage people from making dangerous attempts to cross the English Channel, and put people-smuggling gangs out of business.

But critics of the Conservative government said legal and political hurdles mean the flights may never happen. They accused Prime Minister Boris Johnson of using the headline-grabbing policy to distract attention from his political troubles. Johnson is resisting calls to resign after being fined by police this week for attending a party in his office in 2020 that broke coronavirus lockdown rules.

Conservative lawmaker Andrew Griffith, a senior Johnson adviser, said the flights to Rwanda could start "in weeks or a small number of months."

Migration Minister Tom Pursglove said the drastic plan was needed to deter people trying to reach Britain in dinghies and other boats from northern France. More than 28,000 migrants entered the U.K. across the Channel last year, up from 8,500 in 2020. Dozens have died, including 27 people in November when a single boat capsized.

"Nobody should be coming in a small boat to come to the United Kingdom," Pursglove told Sky News. "We quite rightly have a rich and proud history in this country of providing sanctuary for thousands of people over the years. ... But what we can't have, and we can't accept, is people putting their lives in the hands of these evil criminal gangs, and that's why we think it is important that we take these steps."

The deal — for which the U.K. has paid Rwanda 120 million pounds (\$158 million) upfront — leaves many questions unanswered, including its final cost and how participants will be chosen. The U.K. says children, and families with children, will not be sent to Rwanda.

Refugee and human rights groups called the plan inhumane, unworkable and a waste of taxpayers' money. The United Nations' Refugee Agency urged Britain and Rwanda to reconsider.

"Such arrangements simply shift asylum responsibilities, evade international obligations, and are contrary to the letter and spirit of the Refugee Convention," said the agency's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Gillian Triggs. "People fleeing war, conflict and persecution deserve compassion and empathy. They should not be traded like commodities and transferred abroad for processing."

Previous schemes to "offshore" asylum-seekers have been highly controversial.

In 2013, Australia began sending asylum-seekers attempting to reach the country by boat to Papua New Guinea and the tiny atoll of Nauru, vowing that none would be allowed to settle in Australia. The policy all but ended the people-smuggling ocean route from Southeast Asia, but was widely criticized as a cruel abrogation of Australia's international obligations.

Critics of the U.K.-Rwanda plan say it is certain to face legal challenges. The prime minister acknowledged Thursday it would likely be challenged in court by what he called "politically motivated lawyers" out to "frustrate the government."

The Law Society of England and Wales, which represents solicitors, chastised the government for offering "misleading suggestions that legal challenges are politically motivated."

"Legal challenges establish if the government is abiding by its own laws," said society President I. Stephanie Boyce. "If the government wishes to avoid losing court cases, it should act within the law of the land."

Russia loses warship, says attacks on Kyiv will increase

By ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A day after Moscow suffered a stinging symbolic defeat with the loss of the flagship of its Black Sea fleet, Russia's Defense Ministry promised Friday to ramp up missile attacks on the Ukrainian capital in response to Ukraine's alleged military "diversions on the Russian territory."

The threat of intensified attacks on Kyiv came after Russian authorities accused Ukraine of wounding seven people and damaging about 100 residential buildings with airstrikes on Bryansk, a region that bor-

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ders Ukraine. Authorities in another border region of Russia also reported Ukrainian shelling Thursday.

Kyiv has gradually displayed some signs of pre-war life after Russian troops failed to capture the city and retreated to focus on a concentrated assault in eastern Ukraine, leaving evidence of possible war crimes in their wake. A renewed bombardment could return the capital's residents to sheltering in subway stations and the steady wail of air raid sirens.

Ukrainian officials have not confirmed striking targets in Russia, and the reports by Russian authorities could not be independently verified. However, Ukrainian officials claimed their forces struck a key Russian warship with missiles on Thursday. If true, the claim would represent an important victory.

The guided-missile cruiser Moskva, named for the Russian capital, sank while being towed to port Thursday after suffering heavy damage under circumstances that remained in dispute. Moscow acknowledged a fire on board but not any attack. U.S. and other Western officials could not confirm what caused the blaze.

The Moskva had the capacity to carry 16 long-range cruise missiles, and its removal reduces Russia's firepower in the Black Sea. If Ukrainian forces took out the vessel, the Moskva likely represents the largest warship to be sunk in combat since the Falklands War. A British submarine torpedoed an Argentine navy cruiser called the ARA General Belgrano during the 1982 conflict, killing over 300 sailors on board.

The Russian warship's loss in an invasion already widely seen as a historic blunder also was a symbolic defeat for Moscow as its troops regroup for an offensive in eastern Ukraine after retreating from the Kyiv region and much of the north.

In his nightly address Thursday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the people of his country should be proud of having survived 50 days under attack when the Russian invaders "gave us a maximum of five."

Zelenskyy did not mention the Moskva by name, but while listing the ways Ukraine has defended against the onslaught, mentioned "those who showed that Russian warships can sail away, even if it's to the bottom" of the sea. It was his only reference to the Moskva.

News about the flagship overshadowed Russian claims of advances in the southern port city of Mariupol, where Moscow's forces 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.

Dwindling numbers of Ukrainian defenders in Mariupol are holding out against a siege that has trapped well over 100,000 civilians in desperate need of food, water and heating. David Beasley, executive director of the U.N. World Food Program, told The Associated Press in an interview Thursday that people were being "starved to death" in the besieged city.

Mariupol's mayor said this week that more than 10,000 civilians had died and the death toll could surpass 20,000. Other Ukrainian officials have said they expect to find evidence of atrocities committed against civilians like the ones discovered in Bucha and other towns outside Kyiv once the Russians withdrew.

The Mariupol City Council said Friday that locals reported seeing Russian troops digging up bodies that were buried in residential courtyards and not allowing any new burials "of people killed by them."

"Why the exhumation is being carried out and where the bodies will be taken is unknown," the council said in a statement posted on the Telegram messaging app.

Mariupol's capture is critical for Russia because it would allow its forces in the south, which came up through the annexed Crimean Peninsula, to fully link up with troops in the Donbas region, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland and the target of the looming offensive.

Moscow-backed separatists have fought Ukrainian forces in the Donbas since 2014, the same year Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine. Russia has recognized the independence of two rebel-held areas of the region.

Although it's not certain when Russia will launch the full-scale campaign, a regional Ukrainian official said Friday that seven people died and 27 were injured after Russian forces opened fire on buses carrying civilians in the village of Borovaya, near the northeastern city of Kharkiv.

Ukrainian law enforcement agencies are working to establish the circumstances of the attack, Dmytro Chubenko, a spokesman for the regional prosecutor's office, told Ukraine's Suspilne news website.

Chubenko said that Ukrainian authorities had opened criminal proceedings in connection with a suspected

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"violation of the laws and customs of war, combined with premeditated murder." The claims of an attack on civilian buses could not be independently verified.

The Russian Defense Ministry said Friday that Russian strikes in the Kharkiv region "liquidated a squad of mercenaries from a Polish private military company" of up to 30 people and "liberated" an iron and steel factor in Mariupol from "Ukrainian nationalists." The claims could not be independently verified.

On Thursday, the Defense Ministry explained the damage to Russia's Black Sea flagship by a fire had caused ammunition stowed on board to detonate. In addition to the cruise missiles, the warship also had air-defense missiles and other guns.

The ministry did not say what might have caused the blaze but reported that the "main missile weapons" were not damaged and the crew, which usually numbers about 500, abandoned the vessel. It wasn't clear if there were any casualties.

Maksym Marchenko, the governor of Ukraine's Black Sea region of Odesa, said Ukrainian forces struck the Moskva with two Neptune missiles and caused "serious damage." The Neptune is an anti-ship missile that was recently developed by Ukraine based on an earlier Soviet design.

The missile's launchers are mounted on trucks stationed near the coast, and, according to the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, can hit targets up to 280 kilometers (175 miles) away. That would have put the Moskva within range, based on where the ship was when the fire began.

Launched as the Slava in 1979, the cruiser saw service in the Cold War and during conflicts in Georgia and Syria, and helped conduct peacetime scientific research with the United States. During the Cold War, it carried nuclear weapons.

British defense officials said the Moskva's loss would likely force Moscow to change how its naval forces operate in the Black Sea. In a social media post Friday, the U.K. Ministry of Defense said the ship, which returned to operational service last year after a major refit, "served a key role as both a command vessel and air defense node."

Other Russian ships in the northern Black Sea moved farther south after the Moskva incident, a senior U.S. defense official said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal military assessments.

Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24 and has suffered thousands of military casualties. The conflict has killed untold numbers of Ukrainian civilians and forced millions more to flee.

It has also further inflated prices at grocery stores and gasoline pumps, while dragging on the global economy. The head of the International Monetary Fund said Thursday that the war helped push the organization to downgrade economic forecasts for 143 countries.

Ukraine's port of Mariupol holds out against all odds

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Unbroken by a Russian blockade and relentless bombardment, the key port of Mariupol is still holding out, a symbol of staunch Ukrainian resistance that has thwarted the Kremlin's invasion plans.

More than six weeks after the Russian siege began, Ukrainian troops are continuing to fight the vastly superior Russian forces in ferocious battles amid the ruins of what once was a bustling city on the Sea of Azov coast.

The city's mayor says that an estimated 120,000 people remain in the city, of Mariupol's pre-war population of about 450,000.

The Ukrainians' fight against all odds has scuttled Moscow's designs, tying up significant Russian forces and delaying the start of a planned Russian offensive in eastern Ukraine's industrial heartland, Donbas. The Kremlin hopes that an attack in the east could reverse the battlefield fortunes for Russia after a humiliating failure of its attempt to quickly storm the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv.

Mariupol has been a key objective for Russia since the start of its invasion on Feb. 24. Capturing the city would allow Moscow to establish a land corridor to Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula that Russia annexed in 2014 and deprive Ukraine of a major port and prized industrial assets.

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The giant Azovstal steel mill and other industrial plants have been heavily damaged by the ferocious Russian bombardment that has flattened much of Mariupol, indiscriminately hitting homes, hospitals and other public buildings and killing thousands.

The victims include about 300 people killed in last month's Russian airstrike on the Mariupol Drama Theater that was being used as a shelter and had the word "CHILDREN" printed in Russian in huge white letters on the pavement outside to ward off aerial attack.

Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boychenko told The Associated Press that at least 21,000 people were killed in Mariupol with bodies "carpeted through the streets." He said that the Russians deployed mobile cremation equipment to Mariupol to methodically dispose of the victims' bodies in order to hide the evidence of the massacre and prevent international organizations from documenting "the horror the Russian army is responsible for."

The discovery of hundreds of bodies of civilians apparently executed by Russian forces in Kyiv's suburbs after the Russian retreat from the area has fueled global outrage and accusations from Ukrainians and the West that Russia is committing war crimes in Ukraine.

Moscow has deployed fighters from Chechnya, known for their ferocity, to wage street battles in Mariupol. Chechnya's Moscow-backed leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, has repeatedly boasted on his messaging app channel about defeating Ukrainians in Mariupol, but the fight has continued.

Boychenko said that several Ukrainian units are still fighting the Russians in Mariupol, including the 36th Marine Brigade, the Azov Regiment, some Interior Ministry troops and border guards.

The Azov Regiment, a seasoned volunteer force that is widely considered one of the country's most capable units, is defending the mammoth Azovstal steel plant that covers an area of nearly 11 square kilometers (over 4.2 square miles). It has taken advantage of the plant's sprawling network of concrete buildings and underground facilities to repel continuous Russian attacks.

The 36th Marine Brigade was maintaining defensive positions at the Azovmash and Zavod Ilyicha factories until it ran out of supplies and ammunition and made a desperate attempt to break through the Russian blockade earlier this week.

In a post on the brigade's Facebook page, one of its officers described the unit's heroic resistance, saying that "for more than a month, the marines have been fighting without replenishing ammunition, food and water supplies." "The wounded accounted for nearly a half of the brigade's strength, but those who still had their limbs and were capable of walking reported back to duty," the post said.

Boychenko said that some of the marines managed to join the Azov regiment, while others were captured by the Russians. He didn't give any numbers.

The Russian military said Thursday that a total of 1,160 Ukrainian marines surrendered this week, a claim that couldn't be independently verified.

As the Ukrainian troops continue to offer fierce resistance in Mariupol, fears have grown that the exasperated Russians could resort to chemical weapons to deal with the remaining pockets of resistance at the Azovstal plant and other areas of the city.

Eduard Basurin, a Russia-allied separatist official in eastern Ukraine, appeared to call for that Monday, telling Russian state TV that the Russia-backed forces should block all the exits out of the factory and then "use chemical troops to smoke them out of there." He later said that no chemical weapons were used.

The Azov Regiment claimed Monday, without providing evidence, that a drone had dropped a poisonous substance on its positions but inflicted no serious injuries. A Ukrainian defense official said the attack possibly involved phosphorus munitions.

Ukrainian authorities have said that the Russians have blocked humanitarian convoys from reaching Mariupol, keeping it without food, water and power since the siege started. The Russian troops have turned back buses sent to evacuate residents, but about 150,000 have been able to flee the city in their own vehicles.

Boychenko said that at least 33,500, and, possibly, up to 50,000 Mariupol residents have been taken to "filtration camps" in the separatist-controlled east before being forcibly sent to distant, economically depressed areas in Russia.

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Mariupol has seen communications cut since the start of the siege, and as the Russians moved to capture sections of the city they launched radio broadcasts to brainwash the population.

"They unleashed propaganda, telling people that Kyiv and other cities have been captured and they have been abandoned," Boychenko said.

The continuing fighting in Mariupol has forced the Russian military to keep a significant number of troops in the city, delaying the start of the planned new offensive in eastern Ukraine.

"As long as the street fighting is going on, Russia can't remove troops from Mariupol and deploy them to other areas, including Donbas," Oleh Zhdanov, an independent military expert, told the AP.

"The Ukrainian troops in Mariupol are still fulfilling their main task by diverting the Russian forces from other areas. Mariupol remains a major symbol of the Ukrainian resistance."

Easter Egg Roll returns after 2-year, COVID-induced hiatus

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House is hoping to stir up some "egg-citement" when the Easter Egg Roll returns on Monday after a two-year, coronavirus-induced hiatus.

President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden expect to welcome some 30,000 kids and their adult chaperones for the egg roll, an egg hunt and other activities.

The first lady, who is a teacher, is calling it the "Egg-ucation Roll," aides said, and is turning the South Lawn into a school community with a variety of educational stations.

It's the first Easter Egg Roll to be hosted by the Bidens, who are expected to address the crowd and join in some of the activities, although rain was in Monday's weather forecast.

The COVID-19 pandemic led the White House to cancel the event in 2020 and 2021.

Besides the egg roll and hunt, the all-day event will include a schoolhouse activity area, a reading nook, a talent show, a place to teach children how farmers supply food, a photo-taking station, a physical "egg-ucation" zone with an obstacle course and other exercise stations, and a "cafetorium" where children and their families will learn to make and eat treats.

The "egg-stravaganza" will get a celebrity splash through the participation of "Tonight Show" host Jimmy Fallon, singer Ciara and actor-singer Kristin Chenoweth.

More than two dozen costumed characters will roam the grounds, including Dr. Seuss' The Cat in the Hat, the Racing Presidents mascots for the Washington Nationals of Major League Baseball, Rosita and Cookie Monster from "Sesame Street" and Snoopy and Charlie Brown, among others.

Military families will be among the 30,000 participants, including crew members of the USS Delaware and their families. The first lady serves as sponsor of the nuclear attack submarine, which the president commissioned during a ceremony this month in Wilmington, Delaware.

Members of the general public received their tickets through an online lottery.

The egg roll will be the largest event to date at the Biden White House and will unfold in five waves beginning at 7:30 a.m. and ending at 6:30 p.m.

Resumption of this Easter tradition is a sign that the White House is opening up again, despite a recent spurt of COVID-19 cases among members of the Cabinet, the White House staff, Vice President Kamala Harris' husband and members of Congress, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Some of those cases stemmed from the return this month of the Gridiron Club's spring dinner.

Self-guided, public tours of the executive mansion are set to resume on Friday in a limited fashion, after they also were halted in 2020 because of the pandemic.

The White House Easter Egg Roll dates to 1878.

Biden picks Michael Barr for Fed's bank regulation post

By JOSH BOAK and PAUL WISEMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said Friday he plans to nominate Michael Barr, the dean of the University of Michigan's public policy school, to be the Federal Reserve's vice chairman of supervision.

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The selection of Barr comes after Biden's first choice for the Fed post, Sarah Bloom Raskin, withdrew her nomination a month ago in the face of opposition from Republicans and one Democrat, Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia. Raskin's critics had argued that she would apply the Fed's regulatory authority to climate change and possibly discourage banks from lending to energy companies.

But with Barr, Biden noted the importance of politics in a Friday statement that said his nominee had previously cleared the Senate on a bipartisan basis.

"Michael brings the expertise and experience necessary for this important position at a critical time for our economy and families across the country," Biden said.

The Democratic president said that Barr "has spent his career protecting consumers, and during his time at Treasury, played a critical role in creating both the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the position for which I am nominating him."

Barr is the dean of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. He was an assistant Treasury secretary for financial institutions during the Obama administration who helped design the 2010 Dodd-Frank regulations after the devastating 2008 financial crisis.

Barr, a Rhodes Scholar who clerked for Justice David Souter on the Supreme Court, also served during the Clinton administration at the White House, the Treasury Department and the State Department.

Despite those credentials, some liberal critics last year blocked Barr's candidacy to become the Biden administration's comptroller of the currency, a position that is responsible for regulating national banks. These critics viewed with suspicion Barr's role on the advisory boards of the financial firms Lending Club and Ripple Labs. They also asserted that he had helped dilute proposals for stricter bank regulations during the Obama administration.

But Ohio Sen. Sherrod Brown, the Democratic chairman of the Banking Committee, voiced full support for Barr.

"Michael Barr understands the importance of this role at this critical time in our economic recovery," Brown said. "I strongly urge my Republican colleagues to abandon their old playbook of personal attacks and demagoguery and put Americans and their pocketbooks first."

Others offer strong praise for Barr and say he appears well suited for the Fed position.

David Dworkin, president of the National Housing Conference, which advocates for affordable housing, suggested that Barr's understanding of Wall Street gives him the right mix of "centrist expertise and progressive policy views" to win confirmation in a closely divided Senate.

Barr would be joining the Fed at an especially challenging and high-risk period for the central bank and the economy.

The Fed is set to raise interest rates aggressively in the coming months to try to reduce persistently high inflation. Yet it will be extraordinarily difficult for Fed Chair Jerome Powell — who is awaiting Senate confirmation for a second term — to slow inflation by raising borrowing costs without also weakening the economy and perhaps even causing a recession.

"This is about landing a very complicated plane on the runway smoothly," Dworkin said. "It's very hard to do."

Prince Harry, Meghan make surprise visit to queen at Windsor

LONDON (AP) — Prince Harry and his wife Meghan have visited Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle on their first joint visit to the U.K. since they gave up formal royal roles and moved to the U.S. more than two years ago.

The couple's office says they visited the 95-year-old queen, Harry's grandmother, Thursday on their way to the Netherlands to attend the Invictus Games. Harry is a founder and patron of the international sports competition for wounded military veterans.

Harry and Meghan stepped down as senior working royals and moved to North America in 2020, citing the unbearable pressure of their roles and racist attitudes of the British media.

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The couple, also known as the duke and duchess of Sussex, lost their taxpayer-funded police guard when they walked away, and Harry is suing the British government for refusing to let him pay for his own police security on his visits to the U.K. His lawyers say Harry wants to bring his children — Archie, who is almost 3, and 10-month-old Lilibet — to visit his home country but that it is too risky without police protection.

Harry and Meghan are expected to attend a reception in The Hague on Friday for the Invictus Games, which run from Saturday to April 22.

The visit to the queen came on Maundy Thursday, a day in the week before Easter that the queen for decades marked by distributing silver coins known as “Maundy money” to pensioners at a church service. This year the queen, who has been experiencing mobility issues in recent months and came down with COVID-19 in February, did not attend. She was represented by her eldest son, Prince Charles, and his wife Camilla.

The monarch also is expected to miss the royal family’s Easter Sunday church service. She has continued to perform royal duties, including virtual audiences with politicians and diplomats.

In France’s election, a meaty issue unites Jews and Muslims

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — As she cooks lunch and talks politics, Jewish voter Sarah Gutmann has a nasty feeling — of would-be French president Marine Le Pen invading the privacy of her home, reaching directly into her life and the plates of chicken and kosher sausages that she is frying for her husband and their eldest son.

That’s because the far-right candidate wants to outlaw ritual slaughter if elected next Sunday. And that could directly impact how Gutmann feeds her family and exercises her religious freedom. She and her husband, Benjamin, say they would have to think about leaving France if a far-right government interfered with observant Jews’ kosher diets. Their fear is that under Le Pen, targeting ritually slaughtered meats could be just the start of steps to make French Jews and Muslims feel unwelcome.

“Attacking the way we eat impinges on our privacy and that is very serious,” Gutmann said as she busied herself in the kitchen of their Paris home.

“The intention is to target minority populations that bother her and send a message to voters who are against these minorities: ‘Vote for me, because I will attack them and perhaps, with time, make them leave.’”

Muslim shopper Hayat Ettabet said her family might be forced to illegally slaughter at home to stay within their religious rules, bleeding out animals “in the bathroom, back to the way it was.”

Le Pen says all animals should be stunned before slaughter, and frames the issue as one of animal welfare. That’s unacceptable to observant Jews and Muslims who believe stunning causes unnecessary animal suffering and that their ritual slaughters for kosher and halal meats are more humane.

With the largest populations of Muslims and Jews in western Europe, the issue has major potential repercussions for France and could hit communities elsewhere that buy French meat exports. The issue is one of the many fault lines between Le Pen and incumbent President Emmanuel Macron and the starkly different visions of France they are presenting for next Sunday’s election runoff vote. It is expected to be far closer than in 2017, when the centrist Macron beat Le Pen by a landslide.

“We have never been so close to having an extreme-right regime,” Gutmann said. “The alarm bell is ringing.”

Le Pen’s France would be more inwardly focused, with far fewer immigrants and fewer rights for those already here, less tolerance for non-Christian traditions, and less tightly bound to the European Union and the outside world.

Macron is largely promising the opposite as he seeks a second five-year term. Macron zeroed in on Le Pen’s proposals for ending slaughter without stunning to emphasize their political differences. He said he doesn’t want “a France that prevents Muslims or Jews from eating as their religion prescribes.”

Le Pen says she doesn’t want that either. But alarmed Jews and Muslims find her hard to believe. Le Pen is not opposed to other practices deemed cruel by animal welfare campaigners, such as bullfighting or — most notably — hunting, a tradition deeply anchored in rural France where she is trawling for votes.

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So her focus on kosher and halal meats smacks of hypocrisy to Jews and Muslims who see an attack disguised as animal welfare.

Le Pen says the meats could instead be imported. But that also makes no sense to critics, because it seems to run counter to Le Pen's general France-first rule that the country should produce more things itself and import less.

Her camp has also flip-flopped. Jordan Bardella, Le Pen's No. 2 who is heading their National Rally party while she seeks the presidency, said in March that they want an outright ban on kosher and halal meats, both imported and from domestically slaughtered animals.

Jewish leaders responded in a statement that the "detestable" proposition would force large numbers of Jews and Muslims to leave.

But Le Pen and Macron are both now modulating their positions on issues important to voters who didn't support them in round one of the election, seeking to amass the votes they will need to win round two. Macron, most notably, has softened his plan to increase the retirement age to 65. Le Pen is trying to appear more inclusive.

"I'm not at all going to get rid of halal and kosher butcher shops," she said this week. She said meat from animals that have been knocked out electrically might prove to be an acceptable halal alternative to some Muslims. But if not, "importing this meat would be authorized, obviously."

"What we want is to truly stop this animal suffering, very intense, that is the consequence of slaughter without stunning," Le Pen said.

Slovenia, Denmark and Sweden, as well as non-EU members Switzerland, Iceland and Norway, have done away with religious exemptions, meaning kosher and halal meat must be imported. So, too, have the Flanders and Wallonia regions of Belgium. The bans there are being challenged in the European Court of Human Rights by Yohan Benizri, a vice president of the European Jewish Congress.

He says outlawing religious slaughter makes Jews feel "we're not part of European culture" and "portrays us as some form of savages."

Because France exports kosher meats, banning its production "will have a devastating effect" on Jewish communities elsewhere, he said.

"It's going to be a devastating signal as well because — again — we would be seen as not welcome in the European Union," Benizri said.

As her son finished lunch, Sarah Gutmann said the most worrying aspect of a Le Pen-pushed law on the issue would be if it was met by general indifference.

"Then, really, I will be very, very scared," she said. "If I see an unjust law go through and no one reacts, then we'll say to ourselves that we really are in danger."

Jacky's quest: 1 woman, 1 leg, 102 marathons in 102 days

By WILLIAM J. KOLE Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Jacky Hunt-Broersma runs like a woman possessed. And in a way, she is: The amputee athlete is trying to run at least 102 marathons in 102 days.

Last month, a little more than two-thirds toward her goal of setting a new world record for back-to-back marathons, the South Africa native posted something on Twitter that got people talking.

"The first thing I did after my run today was take off my leg. Felt so good," she tweeted. "Marathon 69 done. 31 marathons to go."

That was last month, and she's still running — covering the classic 26.2-mile (42.2-kilometer) marathon distance day in, day out, rain or shine, occasionally on a treadmill but mostly on roads and trails near her home in Gilbert, Arizona. If her streak remains intact heading into the Boston Marathon on April 18, it'll be marathon No. 92.

Unlike the 30,000 others running the storied course, Hunt-Broersma, 46, will have done a marathon the day before. Somehow, she'll have to rally body and soul to run another the day after. And another after that. And then eight more.

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All on a carbon-fiber blade that's been her left leg ever since she lost the real thing below the knee to a rare cancer.

"You make peace with pain," she said in an interview with The Associated Press. "I think my pain threshold is probably quite high at the moment. It's one step at a time."

Boston is the only certified marathon she's including in her quest. The others she's running on one of two loops near her home or indoors on a treadmill — a monotonous machine many runners derisively call the "dreadmill."

In 2001, while she and her Dutch husband were living in the Netherlands, Hunt-Broersma was diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma, a rare cancer more typically seen in children. Overnight, a golf ball-sized bulge appeared on an old scar that had become tender. A biopsy confirmed the worst, and within weeks, her leg was amputated below the knee.

"The biggest struggle was accepting that part of my body was gone," she said. (She's since made peace with that: A favorite T-shirt reads, "A Zombie Chewed It Off.")

Until five years ago, she wasn't at all athletic, but getting started was expensive. Carbon-fiber blades designed for running cost around \$10,000 and aren't covered by health insurance. Survivors of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, which killed three spectators and wounded 260 others, ran into the same problem when they sought to reclaim their lives.

"Running really changed my life," she said. "It helped me accept myself as an amputee. It gave me a sense of freedom. I fell in love with the process of pushing my body further just to see what I could do."

Subsequent marathons led to ultrarunning over extended distances, including a 100-mile (160-kilometer) race. So when Hunt-Broersma learned that Alyssa Amos Clark, a nondisabled runner from Bennington, Vermont, covered the marathon distance 95 days in a row in 2000, an idea was born: She'd do 100. That plan got foiled this week when British runner Kate Jayden completed 101 marathons in as many days, so Hunt-Broersma has a new goal: "Now I'm going for at least 102."

"I hoped it would inspire a lot of people to get out of their comfort zone and push a little bit farther," she said.

She worried her stump would become raw and painful, and the first two weeks were rough. Since then, though, she's gotten into a sustainable rhythm, taking care to ice and massage the stump. When it became swollen, she switched to a running prosthesis with a little more room.

But there have been mental challenges as well on the road to 102, which began on Jan. 17. On a recent outing, Hunt-Broersma — who's been averaging a little over five hours per marathon — felt near collapse at 15 miles (24 kilometers) and burst into tears. Suddenly the entire odyssey was in doubt.

"I had a total emotional breakdown. I was like, 'I just can't do this. What was I thinking?'" she said. "The trick for me is just to break it down into little goals. Just get to the next mile. And then the next one."

Her support team is her husband and their two young children, but she's also gained a large social media following.

This week, after logging marathon No. 85, well-wishers offered virtual applause. "You just seem to eat marathons for breakfast," one person tweeted. "In such bleak times, thank you for serving as an inspiration," commented another.

As she nears the end of her epic quest, Hunt-Broersma hopes she inspires a singular thought in others, regardless of their own physical challenges:

"You're stronger than you think — and you're capable of so much more."

War Crimes Watch: The woman who would make Putin pay

By ERIKA KINETZ Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — The messages, reports from across Ukraine, scroll in real time:

One civilian dead.

Thirteen military casualties.

Five civilians injured.

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Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova glances at her cell phone. The stark numbers and bare-bones accounts that unreel in her hand are just the start; her staff will catalog them, investigate them -- and try to bring the Russian perpetrators of war crimes to justice.

This is her purpose: To make Vladimir Putin and his forces pay for what they have done. While courts around the world are working to hold Russia accountable, the bulk of the investigation -- and the largest number of prosecutions -- will likely be done by Ukraine itself.

For Venediktova, this is personal.

"I protect the public interest of Ukrainian citizens. And now I see that I can't protect these dead kids," she says. "And for me it's pain."

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

The first woman to serve as Ukraine's prosecutor general, Venediktova speaks with steely resolve and occasional humor, and approaches her task with a relentless work ethic.

Venediktova, a 43-year-old former law professor, is on the move every few days, the jackets and dresses of her old life increasingly replaced by olive fatigues and a bulletproof vest. She takes meals hurriedly in the car or skips them entirely.

There are no office hours anymore. There are only war hours, which start early and end late, as Associated Press reporters who spent a day with her would learn.

Her office has already opened over 8,000 criminal investigations related to the war and identified over 500 suspects, including Russian ministers, military commanders and propagandists -- even as an array of international war crimes investigations pick up steam.

"The main functions of the law are to protect and to compensate. I hope that we can do it, because now it's just beautiful words, no more rule of law," Venediktova says. "It's very beautiful words. I want them to work."

On a Tuesday morning, Venediktova marches up to a thick line of refugees waiting in the chill sun to register at a district administration building in Lviv. Her security detail, armed and dressed in black, hovers as she stepped into the crowd of women and children.

Venediktova has stationed prosecutors at refugee centers across the country and at border crossings, trying to collect the shards of suffering of millions of Ukrainians and transform them into fact and evidence before they vanish.

Venediktova sweeps upstairs, down a narrow hallway to a bare room with two large black desks that she calls "the heart of the war crimes office" in Lviv. Her war crimes unit has around 50 dedicated prosecutors, but she's repurposed all her staff to focus on that mission.

Many don't want to show their faces publicly. There are grave questions of security, both for her people and the information they collect. Prosecutors here tend to speak of the future with grim pragmatism. It's not just the unpredictability of war; it's a tacit acknowledgement that they themselves might not be around tomorrow to finish what they've started.

Prosecutors ply the line of refugees at Lviv's center each day, looking for witnesses and victims willing to submit a statement. Some stories are not told. People have come too far, they're too tired. Or scared. Their infants are fussing. They have places to go.

Interviews can take hours. Bent over laptops, prosecutors wait out people's tears to ask what the shelling sounded like, what kind of spray munitions made on impact. They ask what uniforms, what insignia soldiers wore. This is the raw material of accountability, the first link in a chain of responsibility Venediktova hopes to connect all the way to Russia's leadership.

Ala, 34, sits with prosecutors and explains how she'd lost her home. She doesn't want her last name published because her 8-year-old daughter remains trapped in Russian-held territory.

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Ala promises to return with a fragment from a mortar that destroyed her apartment in Vorzel, a town a few kilometers west of Bucha. She'd collected the metal, dense and grey in her hands, as a memento of what she'd survived. And as evidence.

"We need proof for them to be punished," she says. "I am lucky. I am still here to talk about what happened to me."

Shortly before noon, Venediktova leaves the refugee center and climbs into a black SUV headed to the Polish border, an hour or so north. A police escort speeds her through a landscape of rough houses and the wintry bones of trees, past old cemeteries, rusted children's swings, the shining domes of churches. The only signs of war are defiant billboards proclaiming victory for Ukraine and death to the enemy, and checkpoints with sandbags and hedgehog barricades to stop tanks that have not yet come.

Venediktova knows these roads well. She rides them endlessly back and forth to meet foreign officials who don't dare venture into a country at war.

"I live in a car actually," she says. "I need help, support, advisers. I need people who understand what will be next."

Her office cooperates closely with prosecutors from the International Criminal Court and nearly a dozen countries, including Poland, Germany, France and Lithuania, all of which have opened criminal investigations into atrocities in Ukraine.

She has taken on high-level legal advisers from the U.K. and is working with the United States and the European Union to build mobile investigative teams with international expertise. Clint Williamson, a former U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues, helps oversee that effort, which is funded by the U.S. State Department.

"We have to confront this," Williamson says. "There's a need to show that countries are determined to stand up for international humanitarian law and hold people so flagrantly violating it accountable."

Part of their task now is to make sure that the evidence being collected is up to international standards, so the testimony of people like Liudmila Verstiouk, a 58-year-old woman who survived the siege of Mariupol, won't be thrown out of court.

Venediktova meets Verstiouk in a makeshift office at the Krakivets crossing on the border with Poland. She arrived from Mariupol with her papers, her phone and the clothes on her back – a velour dress, black stockings, white winter boots. Her apartment was bombed on March 8, and she told prosecutors that when she fled, she left her 86-year-old father behind in the burning building. He has Alzheimer's and cannot walk.

Verstiouk says she spent a week sheltering at Mariupol's drama theater. She left the day before bombs killed an estimated 300 people there.

She has not been able to reach anyone who was inside by phone. Or her father.

"Why did Russia attack me?" she says. "It destroyed my city - for what? For what? Who will give me an answer to that, and how do I go on living?"

In the course of a five-hour interview, prosecutor Stanislav Bronevytskyy takes Verstiouk's statement. "She can remember every detail, each minute and second," he says.

He types out Verstiouk's story and uploads it to a central database.

Vast swaths of Ukraine have been transformed into potential crime scenes. Each day, the tragedies multiply, creating an insurmountable pile of facts that must be established and saved.

There is far too much work even for the more than 8,000 staffers who work for Venediktova. Back from the border by mid-afternoon, Venediktova continues her campaign for support, on Zoom calls with Amal Clooney and a group of international donors.

When President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appointed Venediktova, in March 2020, she inherited an office plagued by allegations of corruption and inefficiency and a legal code outside experts have said is badly in need of reform.

She has pitched herself as a reformer. Thousands of prosecutors have been fired for failing to meet standards of integrity and professionalism, and so she's got an office that is not fully staffed preparing

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war crimes cases against what she predicts will be 1,000 defendants.

Venediktova has been building alliances with human rights groups – some of which have a history of antagonism with Ukrainian authorities -- and an often-distrustful public.

In March, a group of 16 Ukrainian civil society groups formed the 5AM Coalition to document potential war crimes. In addition to analyzing open-source material, they manage networks of trained monitors who gather evidence across the country to share with prosecutors.

They're joined by researchers around the world, at places like the Centre for Information Resilience, Bellingcat and the International Partnership for Human Rights, who have been scouring the flood of social media postings to verify what happened and who is responsible.

Venediktova also has encouraged ordinary citizens to help by collecting information with their smartphones and submitting it online to warcrimes.gov.ua. Five weeks into the war there were over 6,000 submissions.

Artem Donets, a criminal lawyer who joined the territorial defense forces in Kharkiv, says he is part of a Telegram group of 78 lawyers who are all pitching in on evidence-gathering, picking up incidents that prosecutors and police may not have time to get to.

"We are a law battalion," he says.

On the day he spoke with the AP, Donets had gone out to document the latest attack on civilian infrastructure in Kharkiv. He found himself in front of his own home.

As usual, he pulled out his mobile phone. He took GPS coordinates and trained his camera on a crater in the asphalt, tracing its shape with his finger. "Damage to the facade of the building," he said in a flat, professional voice. "Destruction of glass, windows, doors."

Donets reported finding a rocket from a cluster munition sticking out of the ground 100 meters (328 feet) away. Cluster munitions split open and drop bomblets over a wide area and have been banned by over 100 countries. Using such indiscriminate weapons in what was a residential area with no Ukrainian military presence could count as a war crime.

He sends his incident report to the International Criminal Court and uploads it to Venediktova's database.

"It was quite a strike for me," Donets says. "I hope when this war ends to build a better house for me and my family. I hope. We have no options. Either we win this war, or we will be occupied and swept from history."

The horrors Venediktova and her networks of allies are documenting – mass graves, apparent assassinations of civilians, indiscriminate shelling, repeated attacks on hospitals, forced disappearances, torture, sexual violence, cities under siege, denied food, water and humanitarian aid – are not new.

Putin's military and his proxies have used similar tactics in Chechnya, Georgia, Syria, Crimea and the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Despite years of copious documentation, Western powers never really pushed back.

That changed at 5 a.m. on Feb. 24, when Russia started dropping bombs on its neighbor. Those years of unanswered atrocities now weigh on Venediktova.

"I was a university professor, and for me rule of law wasn't just a song. When I spoke with my students about rule of law, about human rights, I actually trust in this. And now I feel that what I trust, it does not work," Venediktova says. "Maybe we should take the best minds in the legal system, in jurisprudence of the world and create something new."

In the meantime, she has a more concrete objective: money.

As evening falls, she sits with her deputies in a darkening room and asks for another espresso. The jarring notes of an inexperienced clarinetist waft in from a music school next door.

Venediktova's team reports on progress in their ongoing search for the overseas assets of war crimes suspects. One of her priorities is to seize the money of war criminals and give it to victims. She will need cooperation from countries around the world where Russian suspects have stashed their wealth. Many countries can't legally seize assets for a foreign court.

Ukraine is also crowdsourcing this global treasure hunt, with a portal in English, Russian and Ukrainian,

where anyone can upload tips about assets .

There is, of course, an even bigger prize that lies just out of reach: Hundreds of billions of dollars of Russian assets frozen by the U.S., E.U., U.K., Switzerland and others. Maybe one day that too could be used to fund reconstruction and reparations in Ukraine.

Shortly before 9 p.m., Venediktova appears on national television, as she does most evenings. She reassures her people that guilt will be punished and suffering compensated.

"My first joy will be victory when we sell someone's villa, yacht, and our ordinary Ukrainians, who were forced to flee their homes, will physically receive this compensation," she says. "Thank you, good evening, see you soon."

2 dead, more than 200 homes charred in New Mexico wildfire

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN and PAUL DAVENPORT Associated Press

Firefighters took advantage of a brief break in the weather but gusty winds were expected to return Friday to southern New Mexico where a wildfire has claimed two lives and charred more than 200 homes.

The fire has forced the evacuation of about 5,000 people in the mountain community of Ruidoso, where the remains of a couple were found near a burned home as they tried to flee.

New Mexico State Police confirmed the blaze killed the two people after it started Tuesday from a wind-blown, downed power line. Their names have not been released.

Thousands of customers in the area remain without power, and Ruidoso schools have been closed until next week.

"We've had students who've lost their homes. We have to support them on Tuesday" when school resumes, said high school English teacher Sara Ames Brown. She said Thursday she was with students when they were evacuated by bus, with flames visible in the forest outside as they drove away.

Fire crews used a break in what had been a steady stream of relentless gusts to make headway against the flames on Thursday.

Incident Commander Dave Bales said the strategy was "attack while we can," noting that winds were expected to pick up again Friday.

"We're trying to keep this fire as small as possible, especially because it's right in the community," he said. "We've had a loss of a lot of structures so our crews are right there on the fire front going as direct as possible."

The fire moved into a more densely populated area on Ruidoso's northeastern side Wednesday afternoon, prompting more evacuations. Laura Rabon, a spokesperson for the Lincoln National Forest, interrupted a fire briefing and told people to get in their cars and leave after the flames jumped a road where crews were trying to hold the line.

Crews kept the flames from pushing further into the village on Wednesday, and Rabon said that progress continued Thursday as helicopters dropped water and ground crews secured lines on the east and south sides. They also put out hot spots in the neighborhoods where the flames raced through earlier this week.

The fire has torched an estimated 9 square miles (23 square kilometers) of forest and grass, and the strong winds that battered the area have left behind toppled trees and down power lines. Due to the power outage, the school district's servers were down and email wasn't working.

Six new large fires were reported Wednesday: three in Texas, two in Colorado and one in Oklahoma. In all, wildland firefighters and support personnel were trying to contain 11 large fires that have charred more than 40 square miles (103 square kilometers) in five states.

The National Interagency Fire Center reported Thursday that since the start of the year, 18,550 wildfires have burned about 1,250 square miles (3,237 square kilometers). That's well above the 10-year average of 12,290 wildfires and 835 square miles (2162.64 square kilometers) burned.

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. The problem is exacerbated by a more than 20-year Western megadrought that studies link to human-caused climate change.

Elsewhere in New Mexico, wildfires were burning northwest of Ruidoso, 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.

From 'sister' to rival: Dem rising stars fight for Ga. seat

By SUDHIN THANAWALA and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

LAWRENCEVILLE, Ga. (AP) — Reps. Lucy McBath and Carolyn Bourdeaux flipped two longtime Republican congressional districts in Atlanta's northern suburbs by running against then-President Donald Trump and his divisive brand of politics.

But as they fight to keep their House seats this year, they're competing against each other.

After new congressional maps approved by the Republican-controlled state Legislature made McBath's district more conservative, she decided to compete for Bourdeaux's seat. That's pitting two colleagues from the same party against one another ahead of Georgia's May 24 primary.

The race is an uncomfortable development for Democrats who would prefer to celebrate the inroads they've made in Georgia, culminating with Joe Biden becoming his party's first presidential candidate to take the state in 28 years. Rather than building on that success, which was driven in part by support in Atlanta's suburbs, the primary is pitting two rising of the party's stars against each other.

Bourdeaux, who has referred to McBath as a "sister" and previously campaigned alongside her, said in a recent interview that she was "pretty shocked" by the primary challenge.

"If the shoe were on the other foot, it would not have crossed my mind in a million years to go over to the sixth (district) and run against her," Bourdeaux said, lamenting that McBath was devoting resources to defeating her in the primary that could instead be directed at Republicans.

McBath said her push to remain in Congress is "about my work to honor my son," not her primary opponent. Her 17-year old son, Jordan Davis, was shot and killed at a Florida gas station in 2012 by a white man who was angry over the loud music the Black teenager and his friends had been playing in their car, spurring McBath into becoming a gun safety activist.

"To keep that promise to my son and my family and my community, I have just refused to let Brian Kemp and the NRA gun lobby and the Republican Party decide who represents our communities in Georgia," McBath said in an interview, referring to the state's Republican governor and new maps state lawmakers drew based on the 2020 census.

She added: "I've had many people say to me, 'I think you're making the right decision. It's a difficult decision, of course, but I think it's the right decision.'"

The contest is one of five major incumbent-on-incumbent House primary races that will unfold around the country this summer. They include Democratic Reps. Andy Levin and Haley Stevens in suburban Detroit; Republican Reps. David McKinley and Alex Mooney in the northern half of West Virginia; and Illinois congressional colleagues from both parties — Republicans Mary Miller and Rodney Davis and Democrats Marie Newman and Sean Casten.

For some of these contenders, trying to unseat a colleague is just a political reality that comes along with the once-a-decade redistricting process. In Michigan, Levin and Stevens each said they still considered the other a friend despite now competing for a new seat drawn by an independent commission.

"When something unfortunate like this happens, to me, it's nothing personal," said Levin, who opted to forgo competing in a newly drawn battleground district to instead challenge Stevens in a safely Democratic one.

Stevens said that, during a recent vote on the House floor, she pulled Levin aside to discuss a bill they'd been working on. Later, she said, it hit her that, "Holy smokes. I'm in this primary with him and, no matter what happens, we're not gonna be colleagues."

The race in Georgia is especially stinging because it will stunt one of two nascent, promising political careers.

McBath won a House seat in 2018 from a suburban district that was held by former Republican House

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Speaker Newt Gingrich for two decades. The former Delta flight attendant is known nationally as a fierce gun safety advocate.

The same year, Bourdeaux came within a few hundred votes of unseating a Republican in the adjacent district, before ultimately winning the seat in 2020. A former public policy professor and Georgia Senate budget director, Bourdeaux has worked on transportation and infrastructure issues. She was among a small group of House Democrats who urged passage last year of a bipartisan infrastructure law before agreement was reached on a larger Democratic social policy package.

Bourdeaux's redrawn district includes wealthy suburbs in Gwinnett County that have grown increasingly diverse in recent years. It has large Black, Hispanic and Asian populations. A stretch of Buford Highway that runs through the area has become a major draw for its breadth of ethnic restaurants.

The district is heavily Democratic, so the winner of the primary is expected to prevail in the general election.

The two have stayed fairly even in the money race. As of the end of last year, McBath had raised slightly more than \$3 million, compared with Bourdeaux's nearly \$2.4 million.

Bourdeaux has been endorsed by some top Gwinnett County Democratic leaders, while Everytown for Gun Safety, where McBath once worked, has runs ads on her behalf. "Protect Our Future," a new Democratic super PAC backed by a cryptocurrency billionaire, has also vowed to spend big to boost McBath, prompting calls from Bourdeaux's campaign that her opponent should "disavow" funding from the group.

Jovanny Emery Sierra, a 27-year-old technologist at a medical company from Duluth, voted for Bourdeaux in the 2020 general election but is now volunteering for McBath. He said he was alienated by Bourdeaux seeming to prioritize the infrastructure legislation rather than a larger, White House-backed social spending and public works bill known as Build Back Better that eventually collapsed.

"It just felt like a slap in the face," he said.

Others who live in the district say they feel anguished that McBath or Bourdeaux will be left without a congressional seat.

"We have two great, caring people that are Democrats, but through this gerrymandering at the state Legislature, they just cut them up and dilute the democratic process," said Jim Shealey, 72. Shealey said he hadn't decided whom to vote for in May.

Still, Julie Pierce, 65, said McBath's decision to challenge Bourdeaux "leaves me squeamish."

Pierce said she's always thought highly of McBath, but she sees Bourdeaux out campaigning much harder.

"If you're going to parachute in, for crying out loud, parachute in and date me," Pierce said of McBath. "Don't take me for granted."

Anti-virus shutdowns in China spread as infections rise

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Anti-virus controls that have shut down some of China's biggest cities and fueled public irritation are spreading as infections rise, hurting a weak economy and prompting warnings of possible global shockwaves.

Shanghai is easing rules that confined most of its 25 million people to their homes after complaints they had trouble getting food. But most of its businesses still are closed. Access to Guangzhou, an industrial center of 19 million people near Hong Kong, was suspended this week. Other cities are cutting off access or closing factories and schools.

Spring planting by Chinese farmers who feed 1.4 billion people might be disrupted, Nomura economists warned Thursday. That could boost demand for imported wheat and other food, pushing up already high global prices.

The closures are an embarrassment to the ruling Communist Party and a setback for official efforts to shore up slumping growth in the world's second-largest economy. They come during a sensitive year when President Xi Jinping is expected to try to break with tradition and award himself a third five-year term as leader.

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Beijing has promised to reduce the human and economic cost of its "zero-COVID" strategy, but Xi on Wednesday ruled out joining the United States and other governments that are dropping restrictions and trying to live with the virus.

"Prevention and control work cannot be relaxed," Xi said, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. "Persistence is victory."

The risk that China might tumble into recession is increasing, Ting Lu, Jing Wang and Harrison Zhang of Nomura warned in a report.

"The logistics crunch is worsening," they said. "The markets should also be concerned about the delayed spring planting of grain in China."

The government reported 29,411 new cases Thursday, all but 3,020 with no symptoms. Shanghai accounted for 95% of that total, or 27,719 cases. All but 2,573 had no symptoms.

A health official warned Wednesday that Shanghai didn't have the virus under control despite its easing restrictions.

Some 6.6 million people were allowed to leave their homes in areas that had no new cases for at least a week. But at least 15 million others still are barred from going outdoors.

Most people have obeyed despite grumbling about shortages of food, medicine and access to elderly relatives who need help. But videos on the popular Sina Weibo social media service show some trading punches with police.

Grape Chen, a data analyst in Shanghai, said she was panicking about getting medicines for her father, who is recovering from a stroke. She called police after getting no response from an official hotline but was told quarantine rules bar officers from helping.

"We are willing to cooperate with the country," Chen said. "But we also hope that our lives can be respected."

The city government of Suzhou, a center for smartphone manufacturing and other high-tech industry west of Shanghai, told its 18 million people to stay home when possible.

Taiyuan, a blue-collar city of 4 million in central China, suspended inter-city bus service, according to the official China News Service. Ningde in the southeast barred residents from leaving.

A restaurant cook in Taiyuan said his family has been confined to their apartment compound since April 3 after cases were found in neighboring compounds.

"Our lives will be seriously affected if the restrictions last long," said the cook, who would give only his surname, Chen.

"My wife and I are earning nothing," Chen said. "We have three children to support."

All but 13 of China's 100 biggest cities by economic output are under some form of restrictions, according to Gavekal Dragonomics, a research firm.

"The intensity is increasing," Gavekal said in a report this week.

The volume of cargo handled by the Shanghai port, the world's busiest, has fallen 40%, according to an estimate by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China. Automakers have suspended production due to disruption in deliveries of supplies.

Restrictions on areas that produce the world's smartphones, consumer electronics and other goods are prompting forecasters to cut expectations for this year's economic growth to as low as 5%, down sharply from last year's 8.1% expansion.

The ruling party's target is 5.5%. Growth slid to 4% over a year earlier in the final quarter of 2021 after tighter official controls on debt triggered a collapse in home sales and construction, industries that support millions of jobs.

Even before the latest shutdowns, the ruling party was promising tax refunds and other help for entrepreneurs who generate wealth and jobs.

Premier Li Keqiang, the No. 2 leader and top economic official, called this week for "quicker rollout" of aid for businesses that face a "key juncture for survival," China News Service reported.

Under a strategy dubbed "dynamic clearing," authorities are trying to use more targeted measures to

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isolate neighborhoods instead of whole cities with populations bigger than some countries. But some local leaders are imposing more sweeping controls.

Shanghai leaders were criticized for trying to minimize economic damage by ordering testing but no shutdown once cases were found last month. A citywide shutdown was ordered with only a few hours' warning after case numbers soared.

That was in contrast to Shenzhen, a tech and finance center of 17.5 million people near Hong Kong that closed the city March 13 after an outbreak and ordered mass testing. It reopened a week later and business returned to normal.

Guangzhou has imitated Shenzhen. Most access to the city of 19 million was suspended Monday and mass testing ordered after 27 infections were found.

Li Guanyu, a 31-year-old woman in Guangzhou, said residents can leave her apartment compound only once every other day to buy food but stores are well-stocked.

"This happened a bit suddenly," said Li. "Maybe the Shanghai situation is so bad that Guangzhou started mass testing and lockdowns as soon as cases were discovered."

Russia's damaged Black Sea flagship sinks in latest setback

By ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The flagship of Russia's Black Sea fleet, a guided-missile cruiser that became a potent target of Ukrainian defiance in the opening days of the war, sank Thursday after it was heavily damaged in the latest setback for Moscow's invasion.

Ukrainian officials said their forces hit the vessel with missiles, while Russia acknowledged a fire aboard the Moskva but no attack. U.S. and other Western officials could not confirm what caused the blaze.

The loss of the warship named for the Russian capital is a devastating symbolic defeat for Moscow as its troops regroup for a renewed offensive in eastern Ukraine after retreating from much of the north, including the capital, Kyiv.

In his nightly video address to the nation, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy alluded to the sinking as he told Ukrainians they should be proud of having survived 50 days under attack when the Russians "gave us a maximum of five."

Listing the many ways Ukraine has defended against the invasion, he noted "those who showed that Russian warships can sail away, even if it's to the bottom" of the sea. It was his only reference to the missile cruiser.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the ship sank in a storm while being towed to a port. Russia earlier said the flames on the ship, which would typically have 500 sailors aboard, forced the entire crew to evacuate. Later it said the blaze had been contained.

The Moskva had the capacity to carry 16 long-range cruise missiles, and its removal reduces Russia's firepower in the Black Sea. It's also a blow to Moscow's prestige in a war already widely seen as a historic blunder. Now entering its eighth week, the invasion has stalled amid resistance from Ukrainian fighters bolstered by weapons and other aid sent by Western nations.

During the first days of the war, the Moskva was reportedly the ship that called on Ukrainian soldiers stationed on Snake Island in the Black Sea to surrender in a standoff. In a widely circulated recording, a soldier responded: "Russian warship, go (expletive) yourself."

The Associated Press could not independently verify the incident, but Ukraine and its supporters consider it an iconic moment of defiance. The country recently unveiled a postage stamp commemorating it.

The news of the flagship overshadowed Russian claims of advances in the southern port city of Mariupol, where Moscow's forces 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 Ukrainian troops 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."

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It was unclear how many forces were still defending Mariupol.

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

Mariupol has been the scene of some of the war's worst suffering. Dwindling numbers of Ukrainian defenders are holding out against a siege that has trapped well over 100,000 civilians in desperate need of food, water and heating. David Beasley, executive director of the U.N. World Food Program, told AP in an interview Thursday that people are being "starved to death" in the besieged city.

Mariupol's mayor said this week that more than 10,000 civilians had died and the death toll could surpass 20,000, after weeks of attacks and privation left bodies "carpeted through the streets."

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

The Russian military continues to move helicopters and other equipment together for such an effort, according to a senior U.S. defense official, and it will likely add more ground combat units "over coming days." But it's still unclear when Russia could launch a bigger offensive in the Donbas.

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.

The loss of the Moskva could delay any new, wide-ranging offensive.

Maksym Marchenko, the governor of the Odesa region, across the Black Sea to the northwest of Sevastopol, said the Ukrainians struck the ship with two Neptune missiles and caused "serious damage."

Russia's Defense Ministry said ammunition on board detonated as a result of a fire, without saying what caused the blaze. It said the "main missile weapons" were not damaged. In addition to the cruise missiles, the warship also had air-defense missiles and other guns.

The Neptune is an anti-ship missile that was recently developed by Ukraine and based on an earlier Soviet design. The launchers are mounted on trucks stationed near the coast, and, according to the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, the missiles can hit targets up to 280 kilometers (175 miles) away. That would have put the Moskva within range, based on where it was when the fire began.

Launched as the Slava in 1979, the cruiser saw service in the Cold War and during conflicts in Georgia and Syria, and helped conduct peacetime scientific research with the United States. During the Cold War, it carried nuclear weapons.

In 1989, the Slava was supposed to host a meeting off Malta between Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and U.S. President George H.W. Bush, but gale-force winds moved the talks to the docked cruiser Maxim Gorky.

On Thursday, other Russian ships that were also in the northern Black Sea moved further south after the Moskva caught fire, said a senior U.S. defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal military assessments.

Before the Moskva sank, Yuriy Sak, an adviser to Ukraine's defense minister, told AP its removal would mean "we can only have a sigh of relief."

While the U.S. was not able to confirm Ukraine's claims of striking the warship, U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan called it "a big blow to Russia."

"They've had to kind of choose between two stories: One story is that it was just incompetence, and the other was that they came under attack, and neither is a particularly good outcome for them," Sullivan told the Economic Club of Washington.

Russia invaded on Feb. 24 and has lost potentially thousands of fighters. The conflict has killed untold numbers of Ukrainian civilians and forced millions more to flee.

It has also further inflated prices at grocery stores and gasoline pumps, while dragging on the global economy. The head of the International Monetary Fund said Thursday that the war helped push the organization to downgrade economic forecasts for 143 countries.

Also Thursday, Russian authorities accused Ukraine of sending two low-flying military helicopters some 11 kilometers (7 miles) across the border and firing on residential buildings in the village of Klimovo, in Russia's

Bryansk region. Russia's Investigative Committee said seven people, including a toddler, were wounded. Russia's state security service had earlier said Ukrainian forces fired mortar rounds at a border post in Bryansk as refugees were crossing, forcing them to flee.

The reports could not be independently verified. Earlier this month, Ukrainian security officials denied that Kyiv was behind an air strike on an oil depot in the Russian city of Belgorod, some 55 kilometers (35 miles) from the border.

AP sources: Trump aide Stephen Miller speaks to 1/6 panel

By ERIC TUCKER and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Stephen Miller, who served as a top aide to President Donald Trump, was questioned for hours Thursday by the congressional committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection.

Miller was a senior adviser for policy during the Trump administration and a central figure in many of the Republican's decisions. He had resisted previous efforts by the committee, filing a lawsuit last month seeking to quash a subpoena for his phone records.

Miller was interviewed virtually for about eight hours, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private testimony. A second person also confirmed that Miller appeared before the committee. A spokesperson for the committee said the panel had no comment, and Miller did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

Miller is the latest in a series of sit-downs the committee has scored with those in Trump's inner circle as lawmakers move closer to the former president by questioning people who were with him on the day of the attack or were his confidants in the weeks leading up to it.

His appearance comes weeks after Ivanka Trump and her husband, Jared Kushner, also agreed to sit down with congressional investigators, months after the committee had first reached out.

Members of the panel said Kushner's testimony in late March, which lasted more than six hours, was helpful. Ivanka Trump, who was with her father in the White House on Jan. 6, was questioned for eight hours last week as congressional investigators tried to piece together her father's failed effort to delay the certification of the 2020 election results.

The nine-member panel subpoenaed the former Trump adviser in November along with Steve Bannon and former press secretary Kayleigh McEnany. Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., the panel's chairman, said at the time that Miller was aware of and had participated in "efforts to spread false information about alleged voter fraud" and had encouraged state legislatures to alter the outcome of the 2020 election by appointing alternate electors.

Thompson has also said that Miller helped prepare Trump's remarks for a rally on the Ellipse that preceded the insurrection and was with Trump when he spoke.

The House voted last week to hold former Trump advisers Peter Navarro and Dan Scavino in contempt for their monthlong refusal to comply with subpoenas. The move was the third time the panel has referred people in the former president's orbit to the Justice Department for potential prosecution for contempt. The first two referrals, sent late last year, were for former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows and Bannon.

The contempt referral against Bannon resulted in an indictment, with a trial set to start in July. The Justice Department has been slower to decide whether to prosecute Meadows, much to the committee's frustration.

By agreeing to cooperate, Miller appears to be looking to avoid the fate of those former advisers and administration officials.

For the committee, comprised of seven Democrats and two Republicans, the central facts of the insurrection are known, but what members are hoping to do with the more than 850 interviews and over 100,000 documents is fill in the remaining gaps about the attack on the Capitol. Lawmakers say they are committed to presenting a full accounting to ensure it never happens again.

The panel is examining every aspect of the riot, including what Trump was doing while it unfolded and

any connections between the White House and the Trump supporters who broke into the Capitol building. Members plan to release information in the coming months as the committee begins to hold public hearings and eventually release a series of reports on the insurrection. While there have been discussions about the possibility of eventually pursuing a criminal referral against Trump, lawmakers have not made a final decision.

EXPLAINER: State of mind a key in Patrick Lyoya's shooting

By ED WHITE Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — The fatal shooting of Patrick Lyoya in Michigan raises questions about why a traffic stop turned into a foot chase and vigorous tussle before the motorist was killed by a police officer while facing the ground.

Lyoya, a 26-year-old Black man, was shot in the head in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on April 4. The city's new police chief took the unusual step of releasing videos of the violent confrontation over objections of the prosecutor, who will ultimately decide whether the white officer should be charged.

"It is an unjustifiable use of deadly force because the police escalated a traffic stop into an execution," said Benjamin Crump, an attorney for Lyoya's family.

State police are handling the investigation. Here's a look at key considerations:

NECESSARY FORCE?

Video showed Lyoya emerging from a car and refusing the officer's command to get back inside, then briefly running away in the residential neighborhood. The officer is heard saying he stopped the car because the license plate didn't match the vehicle.

The pair wrestled as the officer repeatedly demanded that Lyoya give up. Before shooting Lyoya on the ground, the officer loudly claimed that the man had possession of his police Taser.

"Beyond the videos, I think the biggest factors will be the condition of the Taser and what, if anything, the motorist was trying to do with it," said Seth Stoughton, a professor at University of South Carolina School of Law and expert on the use of force.

He testified for prosecutors at the murder trial of Derek Chauvin, the Minneapolis officer who was convicted of killing George Floyd.

"If the Taser only held the cartridge that had already been discharged, that means it could only be used to 'drive stun,' which hurts but doesn't have any real risk of incapacitating an officer. ... Whether the Taser could realistically be used to disable the officer is hugely important," Stoughton said.

WHY CHASE LYOYA?

Pursuits on foot can be dangerous, and in recent years more police departments have adopted chase policies. Grand Rapids does not have one, but it's "something that is addressed in training," spokeswoman Jennifer Kalczuk said.

David Carter, a criminal justice professor at Michigan State University and former police officer, said he could sense fear, frustration and exhaustion in the officer's voice on the videos, three things that could have affected his decisions.

"There were times when he could have just let him go," said Carter, who noted that lowering the heat during conflicts involving police is preferred. "Unless we know specifically that this person poses a threat to public safety, we'll get him later."

But Richard Convertino, a Detroit-area defense lawyer who has represented police officers, said pursuing people is a cop's job.

"What if he turned out to be a fugitive? Then you'd be questioned with, 'Why didn't you chase him?'" Convertino said. "A person not complying directly with something as routine as a traffic stop could indicate something is very wrong. Combativeness is very unusual."

WHAT DID THE OFFICER BELIEVE?

An officer's state of mind is a key factor for a prosecutor and a jury.

"If the prosecutor concludes that the officer reasonably — but mistakenly — thought that (Lyoya) pre-

sented an imminent threat of death or great bodily harm when, in fact, he did not, they may be limited or precluded from bringing certain charges," Stoughton said.

In 2019, Convertino argued that a Michigan trooper feared for his safety when he fired a Taser from his patrol car at an unarmed Detroit teen who was joyriding on an all-terrain vehicle. Damon Grimes, 15, crashed and died. Mark Bessner was convicted of involuntary manslaughter.

"These things can go from zero to 90 in a millisecond," Convertino said Thursday, referring to sudden conflicts between police and the public. "This officer may have felt, 'I'm getting overwhelmed. I'm exhausted. He might overpower me. He has my Taser.'"

Convertino said release of the videos could put "remarkable community pressure" on the Kent County prosecutor to charge the officer.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The prosecutor, Chris Becker, said the public shouldn't expect a quick decision.

While the videos "are an important piece of evidence, they are not all of the evidence," he said. "Our office has never made, and will not make, a decision based on partial evidence."

Lyoya's family, refugees from Congo, wants the officer charged.

"That was my beloved son. You know how you love your firstborn son," his mother, Dorcas, said through an interpreter.

LA political donor gets 30 years in prison for fetish deaths

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Ed Buck told his neighbors that the steady stream of young Black men leaving his West Hollywood apartment were social work clients. What really happened behind closed doors, which he referred to as the "gates of hell," was far more sinister.

The men did not need Buck's help — they needed to be saved from him, said federal prosecutors in Los Angeles said. Some barely escaped with their lives. Two men didn't.

Buck, 67, a wealthy gay white donor to Democratic, LGBTQ and animal rights causes, was sentenced Thursday in U.S. District Court to 30 years in federal prison for injecting two men with lethal doses of methamphetamine as part of a fetish that turned fatal.

Prosecutors, who sought a life term, said Buck had such disregard for life that even after the two deaths in his apartment, he did not stop paying men to come to his home and injecting them with walloping doses of methamphetamine. One man overdosed twice in the course of a week.

"This defendant preyed upon vulnerable victims — men who were drug-dependent and often without homes — to feed an obsession that led to death and misery," United States Attorney Tracy L. Wilkison said. "Mr. Buck continues to pose a clear danger to society."

Buck was convicted in July of distribution of methamphetamine resulting in the deaths of Gemmel Moore in 2017 and Timothy Dean in 2019. He was also convicted of four counts of meth distribution, two counts of enticing men to travel across state lines for prostitution and a count of maintaining a drug den.

Buck managed to avoid arrest for more than two years after Moore's death and family and community members led by political strategist Jasmyne Cannick complained that he escaped prosecution because of wealth, political ties and race. He donated more than \$500,000 since 2000 to mainly Democratic causes.

Moore's mother, LaTisha Nixon, joined Cannick and several other friends and family members of the deceased to ask the judge for the maximum sentence. Nixon, a certified nursing assistant who said she had prayed with and comforted countless dying people, broke down as she thought of the way her oldest child died.

"All I can think about is how my son died naked on a mattress with no love around him," Nixon said. "No one to hold his hand or tell him good things."

Defense lawyer Mark Werksman sought a 10-year term — half of the mandatory minimum of 20 years Buck faced and well below the 25 years recommended by the probation department. He said Buck's sexual abuse as a child and health problems that led to his drug addiction were mitigating factors.

He said prosecutors had cast Buck as a "sociopathic syringe-wielding sexual predator and sexual deviant

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who preys on homeless drug-addicted male prostitutes and kills them by recklessly overdosing them on methamphetamine."

"But there's a second Ed Buck, a redeemable, a worthy, a valuable Ed Buck who deserves this court's compassion and mercy," Werksman said.

Buck made his first public remarks since his arrest in September 2019, apologizing for "my part in the tragic deaths" of Moore and Dean, whom he said were friends he loved. In a husky voice, he said he had not caused their deaths but expressed condolences to their families — something they said he never did after their deaths.

Buck, who worked as a model and then made a small fortune selling an Arizona company he rescued from bankruptcy, said he tried to live a good life devoted to political causes that would make his world a better place.

His political activism began with efforts in 1987 to recall Republican Arizona Gov. Evan Mecham, who was ultimately convicted in an impeachment trial and kicked out of office. Buck said he started an AIDS information organization in the 1980s, marched for gay and human rights and championed a ban on fur sales in West Hollywood.

"Look at the good I have done and the good I may still do and not the horrible caricature that the government painted me as a meth-fueled ax killer," Buck said. "That's not who I am."

Judge Christina Snyder said the case was one of the most difficult and tragic ones she had presided over. She said Buck's "horrific crimes" were reprehensible and more than just an accident.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Chelsea Norell objected to the 30-year sentence, arguing that the mandatory minimum sentences for each death add up to 40 years.

"He is effectively getting one kill and one kill 50% off," Norell said.

Family members of Dean and Moore said they were disappointed he didn't get a life sentence but were happy Buck was going away for a long time. They said his apology had come too late to seem sincere.

"That's not love when you kill someone," said Dean's sister, Joann Campbell. "That was just something he was saying ... to get some sympathy from the judge. But I don't believe and buy any of it."

Even after Dean's death, Buck remained undeterred, Norell said. Holed up in a hotel to avoid the police, he injected Dane Brown with back-to-back "slams" of methamphetamine.

Brown, who was homeless, later moved into Buck's apartment, where he was injected with meth most days and often several times a day.

On Sept. 4, 2019, after Buck shot him up three times with back-to-back doses, Brown was hospitalized for overdosing. He had five times the meth in his system that Moore and Dean had when they died, prosecutors said.

Brown returned less than a week later and Buck injected him three times with meth. Brown said he was overdosing again. He was exhausted and weak but Buck wouldn't call an ambulance.

"I can't run, I can't move and it's like all my energy was being sapped out," Brown recalled Thursday outside court.

That's when he heard the voice of his late mother tell him to get up.

"At that last moment, right when I was giving up and closed my eyes, I heard the voice," Brown said. "It's like she lit a fire and told me to get out and get out now."

Brown managed to get himself to a nearby gas station and was taken to the hospital. It was that incident that finally led to Buck's arrest.

If he hadn't made it out of Buck's apartment, Brown said he would have died there like Moore and Dean.

The AP Interview: UN food chief says Mariupol is starving

By ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The head of the U.N. World Food Program said people are being "starved to death" in the besieged Ukrainian city of Mariupol, and he predicted the country's humanitarian crisis is likely to worsen as Russia intensifies its assault in the coming weeks.

WFP executive director David Beasley also warned in an interview Thursday with The Associated Press

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in Kyiv that Russia's invasion of grain-exporting Ukraine risks destabilizing nations far from its shores and could trigger waves of migrants seeking better lives elsewhere.

The war that began Feb. 24 was "devastating the people in Ukraine," he said, lamenting the lack of access faced by the WFP and other aid organizations in trying to reach those in need amid the conflict.

"I don't see any of that easing up. I just don't see it happening right now," he said.

The fluid nature of the conflict, which has seen fighting shift away from areas around the capital and toward eastern Ukraine, has made it especially difficult to reach hungry Ukrainians.

The WFP is trying to put food supplies now in areas that could be caught up in the fighting, but Beasley acknowledged that there are "a lot of complexities" as the situation rapidly evolves.

A lack of access is part of the problem, he said, but so is a shortage of manpower and fuel as resources are diverted to the war effort.

"It's not just going to be the next few days — but the next few weeks and few months could even get more complicated than it is now," he said. "In fact, it's getting worse and worse, concentrated in certain areas, and the front lines are going to be moving."

Beasley expressed particular concern about the port city of Mariupol, where a dwindling number of Ukrainian defenders is holding out against a Russian siege that has trapped well over 100,000 civilians in desperate need of food, water and heating.

Russian forces that control access to the city have not allowed in aid, even though the WFP has demanded access.

"We will not give up on the people of Mariupol and other people that we cannot reach. But it's a devastating situation: the people being starved to death," he said.

Russia is determined to seize the city so its forces from the annexed Crimean Peninsula can fully link up with troops elsewhere in the eastern Donbas region, Ukraine's industrial heartland and the target of the coming offensive.

The U.N. food chief warned of disastrous ripple effects due to Ukraine's role as major international grain supplier.

A global food shortage caused by the war could prompt "mass migration beyond anything we've seen since World War II," he said, echoing remarks he made to the U.N. Security Council last month.

Russia and Ukraine together produce 30% of the world's wheat supply and export about three-quarters of the world's sunflower seed oil. Half of the grain the WFP buys for distribution around the world comes from Ukraine.

Some 30 million metric tons of grain bound for export are unable to be shipped because of the war, Beasley said. Ukrainian farmers are struggling to access fertilizer and seed, and those who can plant may see their harvest rot in the fields if the war drags on and there's no way to ship it, he warned.

The shipping challenges have forced the WFP to halve rations for millions of people, many in Africa, and more cuts may be needed, he said.

"People are going to be starving to death," he said.

Beasley also visited areas near Kyiv that were ravaged by the Russian invasion, including the town of Bucha, where evidence of mass killings and other atrocities against civilians have shocked the world.

He described neighborhoods "completely decimated by bombings," likening what he saw to a nightmare that was impossible to believe.

But he stopped short of describing the killings a genocide, as U.S. President Joe Biden did this week.

"Well, I know one thing. People are dying," he said when asked about Biden's comments. "But there's no doubt in my mind this is a horror story and it is truly heartbreaking."

Therapist: Depp and Heard had relationship of 'mutual abuse'

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

A former personal assistant to Amber Heard said she never saw the actress suffer any physical abuse at the hands of then-husband Johnny Depp — but she said Heard once spit in her face when she asked

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for a higher salary.

Heard descended into screaming fits of blind rage, sent incoherent text messages at 4 a.m. and was often drunk and high on illegal drugs, Kate James testified in a video deposition that was played in court Thursday during the trial for Depp's libel suit against Heard.

Depp, on the other hand, was very calm, almost shy, "like a total Southern gentleman," James said.

The "Pirates of the Caribbean" actor has accused Heard of indirectly defaming him in a 2018 opinion piece that she wrote for The Washington Post. Heard refers to herself in the article as a "public figure representing domestic abuse." The piece doesn't name Depp. But his attorneys argue that it clearly references a restraining order that Heard sought in May 2016, right after Depp told her he wanted a divorce.

Depp denies abusing Heard, but Heard's lawyers say evidence will prove that he did. The actor's denials, they argue, lack credibility because he frequently drank and used drugs to the point of blacking out and failing to remember anything he did.

The video testimony from James offered an inverse view: Depp was the peaceful one, she said, while Heard was frequently intoxicated and verbally abusive, including to her own mother and sister.

"Her poor sister was treated like a dog that you kicked, basically," James said.

James, who worked for Heard from 2012 to 2015, said she was paid "very poorly." She said she was hired with an initial salary of \$25 an hour and that her duties ranged from picking up Heard's dry cleaning to talking with the actress's Hollywood agents.

James said she also was tasked with picking up two copies of any magazine that featured Heard and storing them in the garage to prevent Depp from seeing them. Heard went into a "blind rage" when James failed to place the magazines in the garage, James said.

Regarding Heard and Depp's time together, James said Heard was a "very dramatic person" who was deeply insecure in the relationship. Heard often called James to cry and complain about Depp, she said.

"I remember one time she called me when she was alone in New York City, and she was crying and walking around the streets," James said. She said she told Heard to go inside: "I was worried that the paparazzi might take a photo of her."

Some of the deposition focused on a text message that Depp had sent to James after he and Heard split up. Depp's text read: "Come over for a spot of purple and we'll fix her flabby ass nice and good."

A lawyer asked if "spot of purple" meant wine and whether "her" meant Heard. James said she didn't want to speculate.

"This is the way he writes," James said of Depp. "It's very random and you don't sort of question it. ... He writes in a very abstract way."

Lawyers also presented a video deposition of Laurel Anderson, a couple's therapist who worked with Heard and Depp in 2015, when they were ages 29 and 52, respectively.

Anderson said both suffered childhood abuse. As a couple, they were engaged in "mutual abuse," she testified.

Heard's father beat her, Anderson said, adding, "It was a point of pride to her if she felt disrespected to initiate a fight."

Heard would also rather be in a fight with Depp than see him leave, and "would strike him to keep him there," Anderson said.

The therapist recalled a time when Heard told her that Depp "was 'stepping up,' as she would say, on a lot of drugs."

"And she slapped him because he was being incoherent and talking about being with another woman," Anderson said. She noted that Depp's mother was in the hospital at the time.

Anderson said Depp told her that Heard "gave as good as she got." She also said that in at least one session in which she saw Heard alone, the actress told her that Depp hit her. She said Heard showed her bruises, both in photos and in person.

Anderson said Heard also told her that Depp at one point allegedly said, "No one likes you. You're getting fame from me. I'm falling out of love with you. You're a whore."

Anderson also said that Heard's "jackhammer style of talking" and habit of cutting off Depp overwhelmed him.

Heard "wanted to want to divorce" but also didn't, and was still figuring out what to do, Anderson said. "She loved him. He loved her. She wasn't stupid. She knew that what they were doing wasn't healthy."

Both Depp and Heard are expected to testify at the trial in Fairfax County Circuit Court, scheduled for six weeks, along with actors Paul Bettany and James Franco and tech entrepreneur Elon Musk.

Family seeks charges, officer's ID in Patrick Lyoya's death

By ANNA LIZ NICHOLS and DAVID EGGERT and MIKE HOUSEHOLDER Associated Press

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — Peter Lyoya took his six children from Congo in 2014 to escape violence. Now he fears he brought them to the U.S. to die.

A Michigan police officer fatally shot his eldest son, 26-year-old Patrick, in the head this month following a traffic stop in Grand Rapids. Video released Wednesday shows a brief foot chase and struggle over the white officer's Taser before he shoots Patrick Lyoya in the head as the Black man is face down on the ground.

Peter Lyoya said Thursday that he came to the U.S. to get away from prolonged civil unrest in which several rebel groups have vied for control of territories in mineral-rich eastern Congo. Patrick, who had two young children of his own, lived in Grand Rapids and visited Lansing on weekends and would spend money on his siblings, his father said.

"Patrick never had a problem with anybody," his dad told The Associated Press through an interpreter during an interview at his Lansing apartment. He and his wife later spoke at an emotional news conference in Grand Rapids, a city of about 200,000 people that's about 150 miles (240 kilometers) northwest of Detroit.

In the April 4 encounter, the officer repeatedly ordered Patrick Lyoya to let go of the Taser.

Grand Rapids Police Chief Eric Winstrom cited a need for transparency when releasing video collected from a passenger in the car Lyoya was driving, the officer's body camera, the officer's patrol car and a doorbell camera. Winstrom did not identify the officer, a seven-year veteran who is on paid leave while state police investigate the shooting.

Lawyers for the Lyoya family said the officer should be prosecuted and fired.

"The video shows us that this is as his mother and father have said — an execution. And there is no way to try to spin it or justify," prominent civil rights attorney Ben Crump said as Patrick's parents cried. "It is an unjustifiable use of deadly force because the police escalated a traffic stop into an execution."

The Lyoyas also asked for police to release the officer's name. Patrick's brothers and sisters want to know who killed him and would like to see his picture so they can know "this is the person that took our beloved one," Peter Lyoya said.

Prosecutor Chris Becker, who will decide whether any charges are warranted, said the public should not expect a quick decision.

Video shows Patrick Lyoya running from the officer who stopped him for driving with a license plate that did not belong to the vehicle. They struggled in front of several homes.

Winstrom said the fight over the Taser lasted about 90 seconds. In the final moments, the officer was on top of Lyoya, kneeling on his back at times.

"From my view of the video, Taser was deployed twice. Taser did not make contact," Winstrom, a former high-ranking Chicago police commander who became Grand Rapids chief in March, told reporters. "And Mr. Lyoya was shot in the head. However, that's the only information that I have."

The traffic stop was tense from the start. Video shows Lyoya getting out of the car before the officer approached. He ordered Lyoya to get back in the vehicle, but the man declined.

The officer demanded his driver's license and asked him if he spoke English. Lyoya responded "yes" and said the license was in the vehicle. The foot chase began after Lyoya closed the car door and started walking. The officer told Lyoya to "stop" and tried to pull his hands behind his back.

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Lyoya's mother, Dorcas, told reporters that she thought the family was in a safe place after leaving Congo and was "astonished to see that my son has been killed with (a) bullet."

"That was my beloved son. You know how you love your firstborn son," she said through an interpreter.

Crump said the officer could have waited for backup once Lyoya ran but instead got "violent." He accused him of not following proper training by using the Taser while close to Lyoya, saying it was Lyoya's "natural instinct" to try to stop from being stunned.

Because the Taser was fired twice, it was ineffective without being reloaded, Crump said.

"There was no reason for him to have any intimate fear of the Taser being used against him," he said of the officer.

However, a Taser can still deliver a shock after the two cartridges are spent if a person holds it against someone and fires. What is known as a "drive stun" does not incapacitate the person but does hurt, according to Andrew J. Scott III, an expert in police practices and procedures and a former police chief in Boca Raton, Florida.

A Taser can also be used that when the cartridges are still in the weapon. Officers sometimes do that in the hope that they will not have to deploy the Taser's probes.

As in many U.S. cities, Grand Rapids police have been occasionally criticized over the use of force, particularly against Black people, who make up 18% of the population. Several hundred protesters gathered outside the Grand Rapids Police Department following Wednesday's release of the videos. The demonstration remained nonviolent.

A downtown street has been designated Breonna Taylor Way, named for the Black woman and Grand Rapids native who was killed by police in Louisville, Kentucky, during a botched drug raid in 2020.

Her mother, Tamika Palmer, attended the news conference with the Lyoya family, their legal team and community leaders.

"We can't keep letting these people kill our children," she said.

Elon Musk wants to buy Twitter, make it 'maximally trusted'

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN, MATT O'BRIEN and TOM KRISHER AP Business Writers

In 10 days, Tesla CEO Elon Musk has gone from popular Twitter contributor and critic to the company's largest individual shareholder to a would-be owner of the social platform — a whirlwind of activity that could change the service dramatically given the sometimes whimsical billionaire's self-identification as a free-speech absolutist.

Twitter revealed in a securities filing Thursday that Musk has offered to buy the company outright for more than \$43 billion, saying the social media platform "needs to be transformed as a private company" in order to build trust with its users.

"I believe free speech is a societal imperative for a functioning democracy," Musk said in the filing. "I now realize the company will neither thrive nor serve this societal imperative in its current form."

Later in the day, during an onstage interview at the TED 2022 conference, he went even broader: "Having a public platform that is maximally trusted and broadly inclusive is extremely important to the future of civilization."

Since it burst onto the scene in 2006, Twitter has been home to flourishing social and political commentary, shared news, scandal gossip, cat memes and dress color arguments. But it has also provided a platform for viral misinformation and lies, bullying and hate speech and gangs of trolls who can shout down posters they disagree with by unleashing tidal waves of vile images, threats and similar acts of online aggression.

Twitter has devoted a substantial amount of effort to stanching the latter while preserving the former — though not always in ways that satisfy most users. Like other platforms, it has established restrictions on tweets that threaten violence, incite hatred, bully others and spread misinformation. Such rules drove Twitter's decision to ban former President Donald Trump following the 2021 Capitol insurrection.

Twitter has also become a destination for brands and advertisers, many of whom prefer stronger content restrictions, and a megaphone for high-profile figures like Trump and Musk, who's used it to rally support-

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ers and promote business ventures.

Musk, who described Twitter as a “de facto town square,” detailed some specific potential changes Thursday — like favoring temporary rather than permanent bans — but has mostly described his aim in broad and abstract terms.

He said he wanted to open up the “black box” of artificial intelligence technology driving Twitter’s feed so that people would have more transparency about why some tweets might go viral and others might disappear. “I wouldn’t personally be in there editing tweets,” he said, “but you would know if something was done to promote, demote or otherwise affect a tweet.”

The billionaire has been a vocal critic of Twitter, mostly over his stated belief that it falls short on free-speech principles. The social media platform has angered followers of Trump and other right-wing political figures who’ve had their accounts suspended for violating its content standards on violence, hate or harmful misinformation. Musk has described himself as a “free-speech absolutist” but is also known for blocking other Twitter users who question or disagree with him.

While Twitter’s user base remains much smaller than those of rivals such as Facebook and TikTok, the service is popular with celebrities, world leaders, journalists and intellectuals. Musk himself has more than 81 million followers, rivaling pop stars such as Lady Gaga.

Twitter shares closed at \$45.08, down just under 2%, well below Musk’s offer of \$54.20 per share. That’s generally a sign that some investors doubt the deal will go through. The stock remains down from its 52-week high of about \$73.

Musk called that price his final offer, although he provided no details on financing. The offer is non-binding and subject to financing and other conditions.

Twitter said it will decide whether accepting the offer is in the best interests of shareholders. It’s unclear, though, just how Twitter’s board will react after evaluating the offer. It likely will negotiate, seeking a higher price per share, or it may want provisions to ensure that the board remains independent of Musk, said John Coffee, a professor at Columbia University’s law school and head of its corporate governance center.

The board could adopt “poison pill” provisions to offer more shares and dilute the value of Musk’s holdings, if Musk’s stake grows to 10% or 15%, Coffee said. Even then, Musk could still take over the company with a proxy fight by voting out the current directors.

At the TED conference, Musk said he has the money. “I could technically afford it,” he said to laughs.

Should Musk go through with his takeover attempt, he likely could raise the roughly \$43 billion he needs, possibly by borrowing billions using his stakes in Tesla and SpaceX as collateral.

Most of Musk’s fortune, estimated by Forbes to be nearly \$265 billion, is tied up in shares of Tesla. The company allows executive officers to use shares as collateral for loans, but limits the borrowing to 25% of the value of the pledged shares.

Data provider FactSet says Musk owns 172.6 million shares worth \$176.47 billion. Just over 51% of his stake already is pledged as collateral, according to a Tesla proxy statement. That means Musk could use the remaining stake to borrow about \$21.5 billion. He also could borrow on his stake in privately held SpaceX.

Musk revealed in regulatory filings over recent weeks that he’d been buying Twitter shares in almost daily batches starting Jan. 31, ending up with a stake of about 9%. Only Vanguard Group controls more Twitter shares. A lawsuit filed Tuesday in New York federal court alleged Musk illegally delayed disclosing his stake in the social media company so he could buy more shares at lower prices.

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission could punish Musk for hurting other investors by taking too long to disclose his buying up of Twitter shares, but it’s unlikely that it will do anything to stop a takeover, said Chester Spatt, a former SEC chief economist.

“This is going to play out reasonably quickly,” said Spatt, now a finance professor at Carnegie Mellon University.

Jacob Frenkel, a former SEC enforcement attorney now with the Dickinson Wright law firm in Washington, said it is difficult to prove an investor’s intent in disclosure cases. “The mere fact of the violation around the disclosure does not mean that there was fraud,” Frenkel said.

However, there is “plenty of fodder for an investigation” into whether anyone with knowledge of Musk’s share purchases traded in the stock before Musk’s public disclosures, Frenkel said.

After Musk announced his stake, Twitter quickly offered him a seat on its board on the condition that he not own more than 14.9% of the company’s outstanding stock. But the company said five days later that he’d declined. The decision coincided with a barrage of now-deleted and not-always-serious tweets from Musk proposing major changes to the company, such as dropping ads — its chief source of revenue — and transforming its San Francisco headquarters into a homeless shelter.

The turnabout led CEO Parag Agrawal to warn employees earlier this week that “there will be distractions ahead” and to “tune out the noise and stay focused on the work.”

Twitter hasn’t done as well as its social media rivals and lost money last year. The company reported a net loss of \$221 million for 2021 largely tied to the settlement of a lawsuit by shareholders who said the company misled investors about how much its user base was growing and how much users interacted with its platform. Its co-founder Jack Dorsey resigned as CEO in late November and was replaced by Agrawal.

“I’m not saying I have all the answers here, but I do think that we want to be just very reluctant to delete things and just be very cautious with permanent bans,” Musk said. “It won’t be perfect,” he said, but there should be a perception and reality that speech is “as free as reasonably possible.”

Fuel leak thwarts NASA’s dress rehearsal for moon rocket

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA’s latest attempt to fuel its huge moon rocket for a countdown test was thwarted Thursday by a hazardous hydrogen leak, the latest in a series of vexing equipment trouble.

The launch team had just begun loading fuel into the core stage of the rocket when the leak cropped up. This was NASA’s third shot at a dress rehearsal, a required step ahead of a test flight to the moon.

This time, the launch team managed to load some super-cold liquid hydrogen and oxygen into the core stage of the 30-story Space Launch System rocket, but fell far short of the full amount. Liquid hydrogen is extremely hazardous, with officials noting that the systems had been checked for leaks prior to the test.

Technicians deliberately left the smaller upper stage empty, after discovering a bad valve last week. The helium valve inside the upper stage cannot be replaced until the rocket is back in its hangar at Kennedy Space Center.

Two previous countdown attempts were marred by balky fans and a large hand-operated valve that workers mistakenly left closed at the pad last week.

Officials said via Twitter that they’re assessing their next steps.

NASA had been targeting June for the launch debut of the 322-foot (98-meter) SLS rocket. The empty Orion capsule on top will be sent on a four- to six-week mission around the moon and back.

Astronauts will strap in for the second test flight around the moon, planned for 2024. That would be followed as early as 2025 with the first lunar landing by astronauts since 1972. NASA plans to announce the crews for these two missions this summer.

AP exclusive: MLB average salary up 5.9% after lockout

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The average salary in the major leagues rebounded to \$4.4 million on opening day, boosted by a frenzy of free agent signings before and after the 99-day lockout, according to a study of baseball contracts by The Associated Press.

New York Mets pitcher Max Scherzer set a season record at \$43.3 million, topping the previous mark established last year by Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Trevor Bauer at \$38 million. Scherzer earns more than all the current players on the Baltimore Orioles combined.

The average of \$4,414,184 was up 5.9% from the \$4,167,164 at the start of last season and just below the record of \$4,451,508 set in 2017, before the salary slide that angered players during the labor contract that expired last December.

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Major League Baseball projects opening-day payrolls at about \$4.5 billion, up almost 10% from the previous high of approximately \$4.1 billion.

This year's average would have been higher had active rosters not been expanded from 26 to 28 through May 1 following the shortened spring training. Factoring out the added players who are at the \$700,000 minimum or close to it, the average would have been a record \$4.62 million.

In addition, this year's final average will be boosted by the new labor contract's \$50 million bonus pool for lower-salaried players not yet eligible for arbitration. Adding that figure and dropping the added 60 players, the average would be \$4.68 million.

The average salary declines over the course of a season as higher-paid veterans are released and replaced by lower-salaried players.

The Los Angeles Dodgers top the major leagues at nearly \$285 million, up from \$241 million at the start of last season.

The Mets are second at \$266 million in their second season under owner Steven Cohen, up from \$186 million last year and \$154 million in 2019, the last full season under the Wilpon and Katz families.

The New York Yankees are third at just under \$237 million, followed by Philadelphia (\$224 million) and San Diego and Boston (\$212 million each).

World Series champion Atlanta is eighth at \$184 million, and AL champion Houston is 10th at \$174 million.

Oakland, which traded several stars after the lockout, is last at \$48 million, down from \$83 million last opening day and the Athletics' lowest for a full season since 2008.

Other low payrolls are Baltimore (\$58 million), Cleveland (\$60 million), Pittsburgh (\$62 million), and Miami (just under \$80 million).

The Orioles totaled \$38 million for their current players, with just over \$20 million going toward the final season of the seven-year contract of first baseman Chris Davis, who retired after years of injuries and three straight sub-.200 batting averages.

Scherzer was followed at the top of the salary list by Angels outfielder Mike Trout at \$37.1 million, Angels third baseman Anthony Rendon at \$36.6 million, Yankees pitcher Gerrit Cole at \$36 million. Minnesota shortstop Carlos Correa at \$35.1 million and San Diego third baseman Manny Machado at \$34 million.

Thirteen players earn \$30 million or more, 48 earn at least \$20 million and 133 at least \$10 million. More than half the players, 514, earn at least \$1 million.

After several years of widening, payroll disparity among players decreased slightly.

The 50 highest-paid players are getting 30.3% of salaries, down from 33.4% at the start of last season but still above the 28.6% in 2017. The 100 highest-paid are receiving 48.9%, down from 52.4% last year but above the 42.5% in 2017.

Of 975 players on opening day active rosters, injured lists, the restricted list and the bereavement list, 461 (47%) had salaries under \$1 million, up from 46% last year. The minimum was raised from \$570,500 to \$700,000; 57 earned the minimum and 375 were below \$730,000.

The median salary — the point at which an equal number of players are above and below — rose by \$50,000 to \$1.2 million, down from \$1.4 million in 2019 and well below the \$1.65 million record high at the start of 2015.

The AP's figures include salaries and prorated shares of signing bonuses and other guaranteed income. For some players, parts of deferred money are discounted to reflect current values. For the 23 players remaining eligible for salary arbitration, the midpoints of the player requests and team offers were used.

Luxury tax payrolls computed by Major League Baseball are different, using average annual values of contracts on 40-man rosters plus about \$18 million per team for benefits and extended benefits and a 1/30 share of the pre-arbitration bonus pool.

The Moskva, sunk off Ukraine, served in wars hot and cold

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

The missile cruiser Moskva, named in honor of the Russian capital, was launched during the Cold War,

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saw service during conflicts in Georgia, Syria and Ukraine, and helped conduct peacetime scientific research with the United States.

Now the flagship of Russia's Black Sea fleet has sunk in those waters off Ukraine while being towed to port after a fire onboard, the Defense Ministry in Moscow said.

It was an inglorious demise for the vessel initially christened the Slava, or "glory."

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE WARSHIP?

The Russian Defense Ministry said the heavily damaged Moskva sank in a storm Thursday under tow after being gutted by fire. It previously said the blaze set off some of its weapons and forced the crew to evacuate. It denied there had been an attack by Ukraine on the ship, which would normally have about 500 sailors aboard.

Maksym Marchenko, the governor of the Odesa region, said Ukraine struck the ship late Wednesday with two Neptune missiles and caused "serious damage." Yuriy Sak, an adviser to Ukraine's defense minister, later said he was unable to confirm its fate or if it even had been hit by Ukrainian forces.

It was not immediately possible to reconcile the different accounts, and cloud cover made it impossible to locate the ship or determine its condition from satellite photos. The U.S. was unable to confirm Ukraine's claims.

The Moskva was about 69 miles (100 to 104 kilometers) due south of Odesa when the fire occurred, according to a senior U.S. defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal U.S. military assessments.

WHAT WAS THE WARSHIP'S CAPABILITY?

The Moskva could carry 16 long-range cruise missiles, and its loss will greatly reduce Russia's firepower in the Black Sea.

Its sinking represents a major blow to Russian prestige seven weeks into a war that already is widely seen as a historic blunder.

WHAT WAS ITS HISTORY?

The warship was launched as the Slava from a shipyard in Mykolaiv in what was then the Soviet republic of Ukraine in July 1979, according to open-source intelligence firm Janes. Commissioned in late December 1982, it was 611.5 feet (186 meters) long. It was designed to carry a crew of 476 with an additional 62 officers.

The Slava served as the flagship of the Soviet fleet in the Black Sea. It carried both surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles, deck guns, torpedoes and mortars. It also had a helicopter deck.

During the Cold War, it also carried nuclear weapons. In 1989, under Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, U.S. and Soviet scientists took part in a joint test aboard the Slava in the Black Sea to measure the emission of neutrons and gamma rays from a nuclear warhead on a cruise missile.

In late 1989, the Slava was supposed to host a meeting off Malta between Gorbachev and then-President George H.W. Bush, but gale force winds prompted the Soviet-hosted side of the talks to be held instead on the docked cruiser Maxim Gorky.

FROM SLAVA TO MOSKVA

The Slava underwent repairs from 1990-1999. During that time, the Soviet Union collapsed, an independent Ukraine emerged and Russia's economy foundered. Finally overhauled and rechristened the Moskva, the ship hosted both President Vladimir Putin and then-Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi during a 2003 visit to Sardinia.

"Thank God, our cruisers can still go on their own, our planes and missiles can fly," Putin said at the time.

Putin's later comments at the La Maddalena naval base show how much has changed. He described the Moskva's presence as a sign that "the level of trust between Russia and the NATO countries is rising." NATO's eastward expansion and Russian security were among the reasons Putin cited for sending troops to Ukraine.

During Russia's war in its former republic of Georgia in 2008, the Moskva took part in operations in the Black Sea, and Georgia said it was involved in an attack on the country.

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In 2014, as Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, the Moskva blocked Ukrainian naval vessels from leaving Lake Donuzlav.

In 2015-16, it was deployed to the Mediterranean Sea to provide support for the Russian military campaign backing Syrian President Bashar Assad in his country's civil war. Its sailors were decorated for their service there and in the war on Georgia.

The Moskva underwent repairs and modernization from 2018 to July 2020, according to Janes.

After Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, the Moskva took part in an attack on Zmiinyi — or Snake — Island, which sits about 35 kilometers (21 miles) off the coast. In an audio widely circulated online, a Ukrainian soldier responds: "Russian warship, go (expletive) yourself."

The Associated Press cannot independently verify the incident, but Ukraine and its supporters consider it an iconic moment of defiance.

On Wednesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Instagram account posted a photo of him holding commemorative stamps marking the purported moment. They show a lone Ukrainian soldier on a beach, rifle in one hand, the other giving the middle finger to the passing Moskva, its "121" ship number visible on it.

EXPLAINER: What is Musk really doing as he guns for Twitter?

By The Associated Press undefined

Mercurial billionaire Elon Musk now says he wants to buy Twitter outright, taking it private to restore its commitment to what he terms "free speech." But his offer, which seemed to fall flat with investors on Thursday, raises as many questions as it answers.

Among them: Is he serious? Can he get the money together? Would a sale make shareholders happy? And what would the social platform look like if he succeeds?

WHY IS MUSK INTERESTED IN TWITTER?

Ostensibly because the service, he says, isn't living up to its potential as a "platform for free speech." Musk insists that he's not interested in making money off Twitter and on Thursday said his motivation sprang from the realization that "having a public platform that is maximally trusted and broadly inclusive is extremely important to the future of civilization."

Twitter, like other social media platforms, suspends accounts for violating content standards, including on violence, hate speech or harmful misinformation. Its suspension of Donald Trump angered the former president's followers.

Musk has described himself as a "free speech absolutist" — but he has blocked Twitter users who question or disagree with him. Regulators have also accused his car company, Tesla, of retaliating against Black workers who spoke up about discrimination.

HAS MUSK SAID WHERE HE WILL GET THE FUNDS TO BUY TWITTER?

No. And his regulatory filing says the offer is subject to "completion of anticipated financing."

During a Thursday on-stage interview at the TED 2022 conference, Musk noted vaguely that he has "sufficient assets" to complete the deal, adding: "I can do it if possible."

CAN HE JUST BUY TWITTER OUTRIGHT FROM HIS PERSONAL WEALTH?

Musk is the world's wealthiest man, according to Forbes, with a nearly \$265 billion fortune. But much of his money is tied up in Tesla stock — he owns about 17% of the company, according to FactSet, which is valued at more than \$1 trillion — and SpaceX, his privately held space company. It's unclear how much cash Musk has.

"I do think this will be somewhat painful and I'm not sure that I will actually be able to acquire it," Musk said in his Thursday interview.

Musk could sell Tesla stock to raise money — which could hurt Tesla's share price — or borrow against his stock holdings. But Forbes notes that he has already used more than half of his Tesla stake as loan collateral.

WOULD TWITTER SHAREHOLDERS BE HAPPY WITH HIS OFFER?

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The stock traded lower than the offer price of \$54.20 a share Thursday, suggesting investors doubt the deal will go through. The shares have traded above \$70 in the past 12 months and peaked at \$80.75 in February 2021.

There has been executive turnover since co-founder Jack Dorsey's departure in November left Twitter with a new CEO, Parag Agrawal, whose initial actions have involved internal reorganizations. There have not been any major changes to Twitter, which, despite its outsized influence due to high-profile celebrity and politician posters, as well as a devoted base of journalists, has fewer users than social media rivals like Facebook and TikTok. Musk himself is a huge user, with more than 81 million followers.

Dorsey, still a major shareholder, has not indicated what he thinks of Musk's offer.

Twitter said only that it will look at the offer. A spokesperson declined to answer if the board will put in place a defense against a hostile takeover known as a "poison pill."

HOW MIGHT MUSK REMAKE TWITTER?

It's hard to know with Musk, and even trying to game out this hypothetical might be taking the man too seriously. By saying Twitter is not living up to its potential to be a "platform for free speech," he seems to be saying he would scale back content moderation. But he has also called for the company to crack down on spam accounts, which implies more moderation.

He proposed dropping ads from the service — ads are how Twitter makes money — and making its San Francisco headquarters into a homeless shelter. He also seems to approve of a button to edit tweets.

WHAT CONCERNS DOES MUSK AS AN OWNER OF TWITTER RAISE?

Social-media companies struggle to contain misinformation and hate speech. Musk, whose tweets can lead online bullies to swarm his critics online, does not seem keen on content moderation.

"Regulators worldwide will be wincing at the potential free speech implications should Musk's takeover bid succeed," said GlobalData analyst Rachel Foster-Jones. "Musk is clearly serious about promoting free speech for the benefit of democracy, but the line between free speech and hate speech or misinformation is becoming increasingly muddled, and attempts to change Twitter could easily lead to these issues spiraling out of control."

In his talk with Anderson, Musk said that Twitter is "bound by the laws of the country it operates in, so obviously there are some limitations on free speech in the U.S. and of course Twitter would have to abide by those rules." But he said it was "quite dangerous" to have "tweets be mysteriously promoted and demoted" and having a "black-box algorithm."

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Twitter may hire bankers and advisers to help it review the deal, said Third Bridge technology, media and telecom analyst Scott Kessler. And other buyers could emerge. "It seems that if would-be strategic and/or financial buyers are interested in Twitter, they should probably engage now."

Sex abuse case in snowboarding exposes flaws in reporting

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

DENVER (AP) — When former members of the U.S. snowboarding team wanted to report sex-abuse allegations against a longtime coach, they received conflicting information that left them unsure of where to turn — or whether they wanted to pursue the cases at all.

An Instagram post during the Olympics by a former U.S. team member led to allegations that coach Peter Foley had molested them, coerced them into taking naked pictures, crawled into bed with them and nurtured an atmosphere in which women were treated as sex objects.

The episode has raised questions as to whether the reporting system for sex-abuse cases in Olympic sports, redesigned in the wake of former gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar's abuse of hundreds of athletes, is working the way it should some five years since the overhaul.

Foley has denied wrongdoing. His attorney, Howard Jacobs, said that as of March 30 — 10 days after Foley was fired by the U.S. Ski & Snowboard federation and more than seven weeks after the allegations began surfacing — the 56-year-old coach had not been contacted by the U.S. Center for SafeSport, the

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organization formed to investigate claims such as those involving Foley.

"We only received the allegations from the U.S. Center for SafeSport after I emailed them to request that they provide them," Jacobs said.

The Associated Press reviewed a series of emails between the athletes, an attorney at the U.S. Ski & Snowboard federation and employees at the U.S. Center for SafeSport that ensued after the initial social-media post by snowboarder Callan Chythlook-Sifsof. The correspondence painted a picture of athletes who didn't trust their own sports federation to handle the cases appropriately and a SafeSport center that had received information on the case but would not pursue it unless it heard from the accusers themselves.

One email to USSS attorney Alison Pitt sent by a SafeSport intake coordinator said athletes "need to be educated that if they are not willing to come forward, be named and participate in the process, they are in effect choosing to participate in a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that nothing can or will be done to the accused."

The email continued by saying accusers "seem to believe they can throw out allegations and Foley will be removed."

That correspondence conflicts with the center's own bylaws, which state "nothing in this Code shall be construed to require a victim of child abuse or other misconduct to self-report." The bylaws also warn that anonymous reports can limit the center's ability to respond.

Asked for details about this and other emails, spokeswoman Annie Skinner said the center does not comment about particular cases "to protect the integrity of the process and the confidentiality of affected individuals."

"Correspondence with an NGB about a particular matter should not be considered a comprehensive representation of the center's information or investigative intentions," Skinner said.

While the SafeSport Center asked, and waited, for victims to come forward, Pitt, the USSS lawyer, might have had a potentially chilling effect on one athlete's decision about whether to contact the center. An ESPN report that detailed the allegations quoted an unnamed Olympic medalist as saying the attorney described an "extensive and challenging" reporting process.

"It did make me question whether I wanted to go through with that process," the athlete said.

USSS CEO Sophie Goldschmidt told AP that Pitt was "transparent that the process may take time" in her discussion with the athlete, but assured her that reporting to the SafeSport Center was the only way for the case to be resolved.

It took more than five weeks for either oversight organization to take decisive action against Foley: U.S. Ski & Snowboard fired him as a result of its own workplace investigation on March 20, two days after the SafeSport Center put him on temporary suspension pending its abuse investigation.

The SafeSport Center was formed after dozens of athletes across several sports detailed decades of abuse allegations that were not handled properly by U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee and the sports organizations it oversaw. One reason it was formed was to prevent conflicts of interest that arose when executives or employees of a sports organization tried to resolve sex-abuse disputes involving athletes in their sport.

What happened between Chythlook-Sifsof's initial accusations and the now-current investigation into Foley drew the attention of Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, who sent USSS a letter suggesting it was skirting rules that call for the center to have exclusive jurisdiction in investigating sex-abuse complaints.

In his letter, Grassley said USSS interfered by conducting its own investigation instead of filtering the entire process through the SafeSport Center, and "has failed to make notifications regarding sexual misconduct to the center."

USSS responded to Grassley with its own letter that says there is a "grave misunderstanding" about the actions the federation took when it first heard of the allegations.

AP reviewed several emails and documents that show USSS contacted the SafeSport center immediately upon learning of Chythlook-Sifsof's Instagram post.

But the initial contact between USSS and the SafeSport Center did not result in any sanction for Foley by the center. Though the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee had imposed "temporary measures" to restrict Foley's contact with athletes through the end of the Olympics, USSS grew more concerned as

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the snowboard team approached a trip to Austria for a post-Olympics competition in early March. The USOPC's measures expired after the Olympics.

In a Feb. 16 email to Pitt, SafeSport Center vice president Bobby Click says "based on the information the center has, we have chosen not to implement any types of measure."

The next day, an intake coordinator at the center emailed Pitt and said she had interviewed five "claimants," all of whom denied misconduct.

"If I do not get a participating claimant soon, we will be closing" the case, the coordinator wrote.

The emails further pressing the athletes to come forward were sent March 14.

Over the same span, a USSS board member, Lisa Kosglow, contacted the former Olympic medalist interviewed in the ESPN story and told her "Peter is so devastated" about the allegations. ESPN reported Kosglow told the medalist Foley had asked Kosglow to reach out to her. The medalist told Kosglow she was one of the women hurt by Foley.

USSS acknowledged that Kosglow did not report any of this to the SafeSport Center and had subsequently resigned her seat.

"This was a mistake, which we regret," USSS said in a statement.

But USSS stood firm on its decision to temporarily suspend and eventually fire Foley while it opened and then resolved its own investigation on workplace bullying and a toxic environment — a probe that stemmed from the initial sex-abuse allegations.

"Inevitably there was some overlap between the center's sexual misconduct investigation and the U.S. Ski & Snowboard investigation into other workplace misconduct," the federation said.

Meanwhile, as emails between USSS and the center went back and forth, a handful of athletes, including Chythlook-Sifsof, took their cases to the center, which opened an investigation that led to Foley's temporary suspension. It came two days before his firing and more than five weeks after the original Instagram post.

"If not for USSS's determination that Coach Foley's conduct (even outside of the Center's investigation into sexual misconduct) did not comport with the values of USSS, Coach Foley would have continued to have contact with athletes until the Center decided to act nearly four weeks later," Goldschmidt wrote in the USSS's response to Grassley.

Abortion ban after 15 weeks signed into law in Florida

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a 15-week abortion ban into law Thursday as the state joined a growing conservative push to restrict access to the procedure ahead of a U.S. Supreme Court decision that could roll back abortion rights in America.

"This will represent the most significant protections for life that have been enacted in this state in a generation," DeSantis said as he signed the bill at an evangelical church in the city of Kissimmee.

Republicans nationwide have moved to place new restrictions on abortion after the U.S. Supreme Court signaled it would uphold a Mississippi law banning abortions after 15 weeks. The high court's decision, expected this summer, could potentially weaken or overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 decision that established a nationwide right to abortion.

The law DeSantis signed Thursday also deals a blow to overall abortion access in the South, where Florida has provided wider access to the procedure than its regional neighbors.

The new law, which takes effect July 1, contains exceptions if the abortion is necessary to save a mother's life, prevent serious injury or if the fetus has a fatal abnormality. It does not allow for exemptions in cases where pregnancies were caused by rape, incest or human trafficking, despite several Democratic attempts to amend the bill. Under current law, Florida allows abortions up to 24 weeks.

Debate over the proposal grew deeply personal and revealing inside the legislature, as lawmakers recalled their own abortions and experiences with sexual assault in often tearful speeches on the House and Senate floors. Republicans have repeatedly called the 15-week ban reasonable.

A federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report said about 2% of the nearly 72,000 abortions reported in Florida in 2019 were performed after 15 weeks. That same year, 2,256 out-of-state residents

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got abortions in Florida, with the majority, or about 1,200 coming, from Georgia and more than 300 from Alabama, according to the CDC. The origin of the remaining patients was not clear.

Democrats were quick to criticize the new law after the signing.

"Politicians have no business getting between a patient and her doctor," House Democratic Leader Evan Jenne said. "This 15-week abortion ban takes away every woman's right to make personal decisions that should only be made by themselves, with their family, their doctor, and their faith."

The legislation came a few months after the U.S. Supreme Court's conservative majority indicated it would uphold Mississippi's 15-week ban. There also has been substantial support among the conservative justices for getting rid of Roe altogether.

If Roe is overturned, 26 states are certain or likely to quickly ban or severely restrict abortion, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a think tank that supports abortion rights. During the debate over the Florida legislation, as well as at the bill's signing ceremony, Republicans said they want the state to be well placed to limit access to abortions if the Supreme Court upholds Mississippi's law.

"The reality of the Roe decision is that men on the Supreme Court proclaimed that women, in order to achieve equality with men, must be able to kill their own children," said Republican Rep. Erin Grall, the bill's sponsor. "As a woman, I refuse to accept such a perverse version of equality."

Elsewhere in the U.S., Republican lawmakers have introduced new abortion restrictions, some similar to a Texas law that bans abortion after roughly six weeks and leaves enforcement up to private citizens.

Oklahoma Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt recently signed a bill to make it a felony to perform an abortion, punishable by up to a decade in prison. Arizona Republican Gov. Doug Ducey in March signed legislation to outlaw abortion after 15 weeks if the U.S. Supreme Court leaves Mississippi's law in place.

Subway shooting heightens NYC mayor's focus on rising crime

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Mayor Eric Adams, a former New York City police captain, took office this year with a central focus on making the city feel safe and trying to return it to some sense of normalcy post-pandemic.

But the first 3 1/2 months of his administration have been beset by a string of high-profile violent incidents, with Tuesday's shooting on a subway train the most terrifying and public of all.

The morning rush-hour attack, in which 10 people were shot on a system that serves as the arteries of New York, complicates Adams' push to address crime and persuade people that the city of nearly 9 million is safe. It also occurred amid a broader, multi-year debate about policing and crime, and how the city should respond.

In New York City, like many places around the country, violent crime rates have climbed since the pandemic, though they remain far below rates seen three decades ago during the city's notoriously grittier era, or even just a decade ago.

The mayor has been among Democrats who've pushed back on calls from liberals to cut police budgets and instead route resources to social services, and he has sought to bring back some controversial policing tactics, saying they can be employed as useful tools without a return to past abuses.

Adams has a unique perspective. He's not only a former New York City police captain and transit officer, but is a Black man who in the past has criticized his own department's unjust practices, and he is someone who was brutally beaten by police as a teenager.

Since he took office Jan. 1, he's been speaking about policing and crime frequently, as the list of frightening incidents piled up quickly.

The city saw a rash of random shootings, the killing of two police officers and attacks that included a woman shoved to her death in front of a train by a stranger.

"This has been particularly brutal. And I feel for him. I think he's done a fine job, especially as he's just getting used to it," said Adams' predecessor and fellow Democrat, Bill de Blasio.

Most of the violence the city has experienced has not been in the subways but in neighborhoods, particularly in communities of color. But attacks on the subway, a vital sprawling network millions of New

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Yorkers rely upon, loom large in public perceptions of safety.

Adams rode the subway to City Hall on his first day as mayor, calling 911 to report a fight near the train platform before he even boarded the train. He admitted later that he didn't feel safe on the train after encountering a yelling passenger and several homeless people, and said the city needs to tackle "actual crime" and "the perception of crime."

Adams had already announced plans earlier this year to boost the number of police officers on subway platforms and trains and to address crime generally. He has brought back a controversial police anti-gun unit, called for help from the federal government cracking down on ghost guns and pushed for changes to New York's bail laws.

Critics contend that focusing just on beefing up police isn't a solution to making the city safe, but more investment is needed in mental health programs and other social services.

Frank James, the 62-year-old suspect in the Brooklyn subway shooting, spoke of his own mental health struggles in a series of YouTube videos in which he described going in and out of mental health facilities, including some in New York City.

Before Tuesday's attack, Adams had started sending out social work teams to try to connect people on the streets with mental health help and other services. The mayor also announced plans to significantly expand a summer youth job program designed to put young people in paid jobs when school is on break, with the aim of diverting them from activities that could lead to arrest or violence.

After this week's subway shooting, Adams, in a series of interviews, discussed plans to increase the number of police officers patrolling the subways and suggested metal detectors could be installed in stations — a decision that ultimately would rest with the transit authority, which falls under state control.

Danny Pearlstein, a spokesman for the nonprofit Riders Alliance representing New York City bus and subway passengers, said that despite a high-profile incident like the shooting, the subway is still the safest way to get around the city, with traffic accidents and pedestrians being struck by cars a far more likely hazard.

Rather than explore metal detectors and other ways to scrutinize passengers, he said New York needs a better transit system overall that gets more people on board and provides safety with strength in numbers.

"By having transit that is faster and more reliable and gets to more places that people want to go is a way to boost ridership," he said.

De Blasio praised Adams' attempts to address both crime and perceptions of crime, and said public safety experts recommend the best way to make the city feel safe is "more normalcy, more recovery from COVID."

Getting people back on trains and back in the city is not just a reminder of New York's resiliency, but also an added layer of eyes and ears to compliment the police, the former mayor said.

"The overall reality is NYPD has actually done a very good job over the years of making the subway safer and safer," he said. "Police can do so much, but they can't do it alone. They need eyes and ears — and cooperation of the public."

Former City Council Speaker Christine Quinn said it's difficult to have a discussion about how to prevent Tuesday's shooting without knowing more about the alleged perpetrator and his motivation and mental health, and that makes it difficult to link it to a broader examination of other violent crime in New York.

"One of the challenges with crime is you can get three people shot in one night and they're all shot for different reasons that have different solutions and different responses," Quinn said.

She said Adams, with his law enforcement background, understands that crime and criminals are not one-size-fits-all. And while guns may be involved in a lot of crimes and more illegal guns need to be taken off the street, other incidents can stem from gang issues, mental health issues or other factors.

Confronting crime generally requires a multi-faceted response, she said, and help from many layers of government.

"There are very few things that one elected official can fix alone," she said. "Even in a big city like New York, a lot of what exists here is also controlled by the state and the feds."

"But there is no bigger bully pulpit and convening power—short of the president of the United States—than

that of the mayor of the city of New York. And we know Eric Adams is not afraid to use that," she said.

Pressure on US to give Ukraine more intelligence on Russia

By NOMAAN MERCHANT and JAMES LAPORTA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has called Russia's war on Ukraine a genocide and accused Vladimir Putin of committing war crimes. But his administration has struggled with how much intelligence it is willing to give the Ukrainian forces that are trying to stop the Russian leader.

Since the war began in late February, the Biden administration has made multiple changes to a classified directive that governs what U.S. agencies are supposed to share with Ukraine. Much of what the United States collects is shared; some is not. Where the line is drawn depends on protecting the sources and methods of the intelligence, but also trying to limit the risk of escalation with a nuclear-armed Russia.

The latest changes occurred last week when U.S. intelligence officials lifted some geographic limits on the transfer of actionable information — the kind of information used in minute-by-minute decisions on the battlefield. According to several people familiar with the issue who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss classified matters, officials removed language that had limited the specific locations of potential targets in parts of eastern Ukraine.

The shifts in the intelligence rules reflect the administration's changing calculations of what Putin might consider escalatory. The U.S. is also trying to step up support to Ukrainian forces that have surprised much of the world in how they have held back Russia but remain undermanned and outgunned. The Pentagon this week also announced \$800 million in new military assistance that could include more powerful weapons and defensive equipment.

Some people familiar with the directive say there is ambiguity about the new limits. One question is whether the U.S. would delay or limit information about a possible Russian target in areas internationally recognized as Ukrainian territory but that Moscow or its proxies controlled before the war, including the Crimean Peninsula and parts of the Donbas. U.S. personnel have at times limited intelligence that they believed Ukrainian forces could use to retake previously lost territory.

The directive still limits information given to Ukrainians about forces in Russia or neighboring Belarus, where Russian forces have staged and previously attacked from Ukraine's north.

"We are intensely sharing timely intelligence with the Ukrainians to help them defend themselves throughout their country, including in areas held by Russia before the 2022 invasion," said one U.S. intelligence official who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the classified directive. The Wall Street Journal first reported the directive had been changed.

Another U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters said the administration was "providing detailed, timely intelligence to the Ukrainians on a range of fronts."

A letter sent Monday by Republicans on the Senate Intelligence Committee — after the new guidance — urges Avril Haines, the director of national intelligence, to "proactively share intelligence with the Ukrainians to help them protect, defend, and retake every inch of Ukraine's sovereign territory, which includes Crimea and the Donbas."

The senators said they "remain deeply concerned that not enough is being done to share critical intelligence that would assist the Ukrainians as Russian forces move to secure territory in the southern and eastern parts of the country."

Unlike a Feb. 9 letter to Biden urging intelligence sharing "to the fullest extent possible," Democrats on the committee did not join this week's letter, reflecting apparent divisions in how members view the administration's current guidance.

The White House insists it is providing information in line with Ukraine's current goals. Analysts say the war is shifting from a conflict fought across the country to a stronger focus on the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine that Russia has seized or attacked recently. One expected point of focus is the strategic port city of Mariupol, whose mayor says more than 10,000 civilians have been killed in the Russian siege.

In addition to its own intelligence capabilities, Ukraine relies on U.S. and Western support to help it

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plan and repel attacks. Before and during the war, the U.S. has publicly and privately shared intelligence about what it believes are Putin's battle plans in the hopes of undercutting Russia and building support for a forceful Western response.

Lawmakers from both parties have spoken broadly about the limits since the Russian invasion.

Rep. Adam Smith, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said in a television interview in March that the White House was holding back some real-time intelligence "because that steps over the line to making us participating in the war." A spokesperson for Smith, D-Wash., declined an interview request Wednesday.

Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb., on March 1 accused the White House of delaying intelligence due to "overly-lawyered processes," adding that "information about where an invading Russian tank was 12 hours ago does squat to prevent civilian bloodshed."

The directive has been changed to limit delays, officials said. The latest update, according to one intelligence official, is intended to give U.S. officers "added clarity" allowing for faster and more fulsome cooperation with Ukraine.

Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., asked Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin last week if the U.S. was giving Ukraine intelligence to carry out operations in Crimea or parts of the Donbas previously controlled by Russian proxies.

"We want to make sure that's clear to our force, and so updated guidance that goes out today will make sure that's clear," Austin said, adding: "Certainly the current guidance was not clear in that regard, so we'll make sure it's clear."

Ohio Rep. Mike Turner, the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, late last month asked Gen. Tod Wolters, the supreme NATO commander for Europe, whether he was satisfied with the speed of information getting to Ukraine.

"Congressman, I'm comfortable, but I want it to speed up," Wolters said. "And I always will say that even if it occurs in one second, I want it tomorrow to be in a half a second."

UK plan to fly asylum-seekers to Rwanda draws outrage

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain announced a deal with Rwanda on Thursday to send some asylum-seekers thousands of miles to the East African country — a plan it said would stop people-smugglers sending desperate migrants on treacherous journeys across the English Channel.

U.K. opposition politicians and refugee groups condemned the move as inhumane, unworkable and a waste of public money, and the United Nations said it raised "a number of human rights concerns."

The plan would see some people who arrive in Britain as stowaways on trucks or in small boats picked up by the U.K. government and flown 4,000 miles (6,400 kilometers) to Rwanda, apparently for good.

Critics accused Prime Minister Boris Johnson of using the issue to distract attention from a scandal over government gatherings that breached pandemic lockdown rules. Johnson is resisting calls to resign after being fined by police this week over the parties.

Migrants have long used northern France as a launching point to reach Britain, either by hiding on trucks or ferries, or — increasingly since the coronavirus pandemic shut down other routes in 2020 — in small boats organized by smugglers. More than 28,000 people entered the U.K. in boats last year, up from 8,500 in 2020. Dozens have died, including 27 people in November when a single boat capsized.

On Thursday, dozens of men, women and children were picked up by British lifeboats and brought ashore at the Channel port of Dover as Johnson, speaking just a few miles away, outlined the plan.

"Anyone entering the U.K. illegally ... may now be relocated to Rwanda," Johnson said in a speech to troops and coast guard members at an airport near Dover. Action, he said, was needed to stop "vile people smugglers (who) are abusing the vulnerable and turning the Channel into a watery graveyard."

The Rwandan government said the agreement would initially last for five years, and Britain had paid 120 million pounds (\$158 million) up front to pay for housing and integrating the migrants.

Rwandan Foreign Affairs Minister Vincent Biruta said the agreement "is about ensuring that people are

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protected, respected, and empowered to further their own ambitions and settle permanently in Rwanda if they choose."

He said his country is already home to more than 130,000 refugees from countries including Burundi, Congo, Libya and Pakistan.

Johnson denied the plan was "lacking in compassion" but acknowledged it would inevitably face legal challenges and would not take effect immediately.

Rwanda is the most densely populated nation in Africa, and competition for land and resources there fueled decades of ethnic and political tensions that culminated in the 1994 genocide in which more than 800,000 ethnic Tutsis, and Hutus who tried to protect them, were killed.

Johnson insisted that Rwanda had "totally transformed" in the last two decades. But human rights groups have repeatedly criticized President Paul Kagame's current government as repressive.

Lewis Mudge, Central Africa director at Human Rights Watch, said the claim Rwanda was a safe country "is not grounded in reality."

"Arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and torture in official and unofficial detention facilities is commonplace, and fair trial standards are flouted in many cases," Mudge said.

Britain says relocation decisions will not be based on migrants' country of origin but on whether they used "illegal or dangerous routes" to reach the U.K. from a safe country such as France. Not all such arrivals will be considered suitable to be sent to Rwanda; it was unclear what the criteria for making the decisions would be, though the British government said children would not be sent to the African country.

The United Nations' human rights office said it had raised its "concerns directly with the U.K. authorities."

A spokeswoman for the office said the U.K. was "shifting ... its responsibilities and obligations under international human rights and refugee law onto a country which is already taking great asylum responsibilities."

Previous policies of sending refugee applicants abroad have been highly controversial.

In 2013, Australia began sending asylum-seekers attempting to reach the country by boat to Papua New Guinea and the tiny atoll of Nauru, vowing that none would be allowed to settle in Australia. The policy all but ended the people-smuggling ocean route from Southeast Asia, but was widely criticized as a cruel abrogation of Australia's international obligations.

Israel sent several thousand people to Rwanda and Uganda under a contentious and secretive "voluntary" scheme between 2014 and 2017. Few are believed to have remained there, with many trying to reach Europe.

Steve Valdez-Symonds, refugee director at Amnesty International U.K., said the British government's "shockingly ill-conceived idea will go far further in inflicting suffering while wasting huge amounts of public money."

The chief executive of the U.K.-based Refugee Council, Enver Solomon, called it "dangerous, cruel and inhumane."

Rwandan opposition figure Victoire Ingabire told the AP that her government's decision to take in migrants was questionable, given that the country is also a source of refugees.

The British and French governments have worked for years to stop the cross-Channel journeys, without much success, often swapping accusations about who is to blame for the failure.

Britain's Conservative government has floated myriad proposals, not all of them workable, including building a wave machine in the Channel to drive boats back. Johnson said Thursday that the Royal Navy would take charge of responding to small-boat crossings, but that the idea of pushing vessels back towards France had been rejected as too dangerous.

Several earlier proposed locations for the U.K. to send migrants — including the remote Ascension Island, Albania and Gibraltar — were rejected, at times angrily, by the nations in question.

The Rwanda plan faces hurdles both in Britain's Parliament and in the courts. Johnson's Conservative government has introduced a tough new immigration bill that would make it more difficult for people who enter the country by unauthorized routes to claim asylum and would allow asylum-seekers to be screened abroad. It has not yet been approved by Parliament, with the House of Lords seeking to dilute some of its most draconian provisions.

Labour Party lawmaker Lucy Powell said the Rwanda plan might please some Conservative supporters and grab headlines, but was "unworkable, expensive and unethical."

"I think this is less about dealing with small boats and more about dealing with the prime minister's own sinking boat," Powell told the BBC.

Retail sales rise 0.5% in March amid soaring inflation

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Retail sales rose modestly in March, but higher prices for food, gasoline and other basics took a big share of consumers' wallets.

Retail sales increased 0.5% after registering a revised 0.8% increase from January to February, reported the U.S. Commerce Department Thursday. Spending has been fueled by wage gains, solid hiring and more money in banking accounts. January's increase of 4.9% was the biggest jump in spending since March 2021, when American households received a final federal stimulus check of \$1,400. But soaring prices on everything, particularly at the gas pump, are making shoppers choosier about how they spend their money.

Excluding an 8.9% increase at gas stations, overall retail sales slipped 0.3% last month.

Overall, the retail sales picture was mixed, but shoppers still showed resilience in spending, economists said. Business at general merchandise stores was up 5.4%, while sales at clothing stores rose 2.6%. Restaurants had a 1% increase. But online sales dropped 6.4%, while auto sales were down 1.9% as auto companies faced a vehicle shortage. Major retailers will be issuing quarterly earnings reports next month, which will give a fuller picture of the state of the consumer.

"They are spending selectively this month, and the gasoline price spike from the Russian-Ukraine war was where most of the expenditures were made," said Christopher S. Rupkey, chief economist at research firm FWDBONDS LLC.

But he added, "Inflation is not going away, but it will likely stop getting worse and that means less of a headwind for spending."

Neil Saunders, managing director at GlobalData Retail, agreed that shoppers are nervous about inflation. He added that online purchases are taking a hit because he believes they're more discretionary and easy to cut back. He also thinks the pullback online could be a consequence of shoppers assessing higher delivery charges.

The retail report covers only about a third of overall consumer spending and doesn't include services such as haircuts, hotel stays and plane tickets, areas that have been rebounding from the depths of the pandemic.

Retailers are closely monitoring Russia's war with Ukraine and how it could weigh on shoppers' confidence but also worsen inflation. The conflict has already limited supplies of wheat, vegetable oils, and electronic components like chips. It's pushed up fertilizer prices that were already high, made scarce supplies even harder to find and squeezed farmers, especially those in the developing world. In addition to the Russian invasion, rising COVID-19 cases and renewed restrictions in China could worsen supply chain issues.

The Labor Department said Tuesday that its consumer price index jumped 8.5% in March from 12 months earlier, the sharpest year-over-year increase since 1981. Prices have been pushed up by bottlenecked supply chains, robust consumer demand and disruptions to global food and energy markets worsened by the war. From February to March, inflation rose 1.2%, the biggest month-to-month jump since 2005. Gasoline prices drove more than half that increase.

According to AAA, the average price of a gallon of gasoline — \$4.07 — is up 42% from a year ago, though it's dipped in the past couple of weeks.

The March inflation numbers were the first to fully capture the surge in gasoline prices that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24. Moscow's attacks have triggered far-reaching Western sanctions against the Russian economy.

The acceleration of inflation is happening in an otherwise strong economy. In March, employers added a robust 431,000 jobs — the 11th straight month in which they've added at least 400,000. For 2021, they

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added 6.7 million jobs, the most in any year on record. In addition, job openings are near record highs, layoffs are at their lowest point since 1968 and the unemployment rate is just above a half-century low.

Matt Shay, CEO of National Retail Federation, the nation's largest retail trade group, said that "consumers are adapting and shopping smarter for themselves and their families." He believes the strength of the consumer can carry the economy through this economic uncertainty if policy makers implement measured policies and "don't overreact to current conditions."

NRF said the challenge for the Federal Reserve is to cool off demand without pushing the economy into a dramatic slowdown.

To protect themselves against any consumer spending downturn, retailers are cutting back on expenses, while taking a measured approach to ordering merchandise as well as adding surcharges.

Amazon announced on Wednesday that it will add a 5% "fuel and inflation surcharge" to fees it charges third-party sellers who use the e-commerce giant's fulfillment services. The Seattle-based company said on its website that the added fees, which take effect April 28, are "subject to change" and will apply to both apparel and non-apparel items.

Gary Friedman, CEO of upscale furniture chain RH, formerly known as Restoration Hardware, told analysts in late March that the company has seen consumer demand weakening in the company's first quarter, which started in late January, that coincided with Russia's war with Ukraine.

"I don't think anybody really understands how high prices are going to go everywhere, in restaurants, in cars, in everything," Friedman said. "If you're going into a very difficult unpredictable time, you just got to be super flexible. You've got to be able to improvise, adapt, overcome, and kind of be ready for anything."

IMF chief: Ukraine war and inflation threaten global economy

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The head of the International Monetary Fund warned Thursday that Russia's war against Ukraine was weakening the economic prospects for most of the world's countries and called high inflation "a clear and present danger" to the global economy.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said the consequences of Russia's invasion were contributing to economic downgrades for 143 countries, although most of them should continue to grow. The war has disrupted global trade in energy and grain and is threatening to cause food shortages in Africa and Middle East.

Georgieva made her comments in a speech on the eve of next week's spring meetings of the IMF and the World Bank in Washington.

An unexpectedly strong recovery from 2020's pandemic recession has caught businesses by surprise, leaving factories, ports and freight yards unable to keep up with robust customer demand and forcing prices higher.

Chronically high inflation, which is forcing the world's central banks to raise interest rates and likely slow economic growth in the process, amounts to "a massive setback for the global recovery," Georgieva said.

Georgieva also warned of "the fragmentation of the world economy into geopolitical blocs," with the West imposing far-reaching sanctions on Russia and China expressing support for the autocratic Russian regime of President Vladimir Putin.

"In a world where war in Europe creates hunger in Africa; where a pandemic can circle the globe in days and reverberate for years; where emissions anywhere mean rising sea levels almost everywhere — the threat to our collective prosperity from a breakdown in global cooperation cannot be overstated," Georgieva said.

Before the war, Russia and Ukraine had supplied 28% of global wheat exports. And Russia and Belarus accounted for 40% of exports of the fertilizer potash.

"Now," Georgieva said, "grain and corn prices are soaring, and leaders across Africa and the Middle East are telling me that supplies are running low. Food insecurity is a grave concern.

"We must act now with a multilateral initiative to bolster food security. The alternative is dire: More

hunger, more poverty and more social unrest — especially for countries that have struggled to escape fragility and conflict for many years.”

Georgieva called on the world to support the Ukrainians and noted that the IMF had delivered \$1.4 billion in emergency financing to help Ukraine meet its immediate spending needs. The IMF is also offering assistance to Ukraine’s neighbors, including Moldova, which has accepted more than 400,000 war refugees.

El Salvador president’s mass arrests ‘punitive populism’

By MARCOS ALEMÁN and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

SANTA TECLA, El Salvador (AP) — A day after the bloodletting -- 62 gang killings that convulsed El Salvador -- the crackdown began.

Before dawn on Sunday, March 27, just hours after congress approved a state of emergency, heavily armed police and soldiers entered the packed, gang-controlled neighborhood of San Jose El Pino.

Freed from having to explain an arrest or grant access to a lawyer, they went door to door, dragging out young men. They established a perimeter with barbed wire barricades where they controlled who entered and who left, demanding identification and searching everyone.

President Nayib Bukele has responded to the surge in gang killings with mass arrests in poor neighborhoods like San Jose El Pino, each day posting the growing arrest total and photos of tattooed men. The highly publicized roundups are not the result of police investigations into the murders in late March, but propel a tough-on-crime narrative that critics are calling “punitive populism.”

In just over two weeks, more than 10,000 alleged gang members have been arrested — a huge number for a small country of 6.5 million people. They can be held for 15 days without charges, one of the measures decried by international human rights groups and the U.S. government.

“They came in with everything,” said 36-year-old Héctor Fernandez on his way to his factory job on a recent morning. “Whoever didn’t open the door, they knocked it down. They were looking for the guys. I think they took almost all of them, but others managed to get out.”

Critics say the mass arrests are more show than substance. They note that amid all of the chest-thumping rhetoric and slickly produced videos of roughly handled prisoners, authorities are not talking about the investigations or arrests of those suspected of actual involvement in the March 26 killings. But many Salvadorans are pleased to see action against gangs that have long-terrorized their communities.

“It’s for everyone’s safety,” Fernandez said, nervously looking around to see if anyone was watching. He said he minds his own business and hasn’t had trouble with the Mara Salvatrucha, the gang that controls his neighborhood. “I leave, (police and soldiers) search me. I go to work, come back in the evening, they search me. I pass and go home.”

Bukele, a highly popular master of social media, has filled his platforms with photos of handcuffed and bloodied gang members, orders to his security cabinet and attaboys from his supporters. At the same time, he has lashed out at human rights organizations and international agencies critical of some measures.

“If we don’t rid our country of this cancer now, then when will we ever do it?” Bukele said to a parade ground of soldiers -- and the world -- in a video he released last week. “We will go and find them wherever they are. Regardless of who protests. Regardless of how angry the international community gets.”

Gangs control swaths of territory through brutality and fear. They’ve driven thousands to emigrate to save their own lives or the lives of their children who are forcibly recruited. Their power is strongest in El Salvador’s poorest neighborhoods where the state has long been absent. They are a drain on the economy, extorting money from even the lowest earners and forcing businesses that can’t or won’t pay to close.

The wave of violence at the end of March -- it stretched across the country and its victims included a municipal maintenance worker, a taxi driver, a farmer-- demanded a government response. Bukele chose a state of emergency provided for in the constitution.

But El Salvador’s security forces and justice system had the legal tools to investigate and prosecute those involved in the killings without the suspension of fundamental rights, critics say. What they did not have was the carte blanche that has yielded the media spectacle of the past two weeks, starring Bukele as savior-in-chief.

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"There are a lot of doubts about whether the measures that Bukele's government has taken to confront the wave of murders are really aimed at investigating the crimes and responding to the victims," said Lenor Arteaga, a Salvadoran who is program director at the Due Process of Law Foundation in Washington.

Instead, she said, it seems Bukele is using the situation "to advance his authoritarian plans and in his intention to control all critical voices and squash any dissident."

Bukele's office did not respond to a request for comment.

Abraham Ábrego, director of the strategic litigation program at Cristosal, a non-governmental organization in El Salvador, said his group was working to document arbitrary arrests and other abuses.

Bukele has shown himself to be masterful at building and controlling narratives, he said. "There is a term that we use called 'punitive populism,' which is using the state's powers of criminal persecution to show strength, to show toughness," Ábrego said.

On Tuesday, the head of a national police union said some high-ranking police officials had pressured officers to make false statements justifying some arrests to meet arrest quotas, including in a small remote town with no gang presence.

Omar Serrano, vice rector at Central American University José Simeón Cañas, said that like previous administrations, the president has opted for a more militarized approach to dealing with the gangs.

"This is not going to solve the country's serious problems," Serrano said. The government line is that the problem of the gangs is one of national security, "when deep down it is a social problem."

After the congress approved the state of emergency, Bukele returned to lawmakers multiple times for changes to the country's criminal code. Among other things, they lengthened sentences, reduced the age of criminal responsibility to 12 and established prison sentences of 10 to 15 years for journalists who disseminate gang messages that could cause anxiety or panic among the people.

He had already ordered his head of prisons to keep all gang members confined to their cells 24 hours a day and to reduce their meals to twice daily. "Message for the gangs: because of your actions, now your 'homeboys' will not be able to see a ray of sunlight," Bukele wrote on Twitter.

Human Rights Watch, the international advocacy organization that Bukele has taken to mocking as "Homeboys Rights Watch," said the government had overreached.

"The Salvadoran government should adopt rights-respecting measures to protect people from heinous gang violence, dismantle these groups, and bring those responsible for crimes to justice," said Juan Pappier, senior Americas researcher at Human Rights Watch. "Instead, Bukele's government has enacted overbroad, harshly punitive laws that undermine the fundamental rights of all Salvadorans."

But Salvadorans seem to be ambivalent about the crackdown. In a leafy park in front of Santa Tecla's municipal market and short distance from San Jose El Pino, Adela Maravilla Ceballos walked with her groceries on a recent morning.

"It's good what they're doing, they took long enough," the 52-year-old homemaker said. "These guys don't understand anything else. Who is going to be against security? Only the criminals."

Still, some of the images had bothered her. Her two sons went to the United States years ago looking for better opportunities.

"I am a mother and sometimes it hurts me when they grab them and hit them and I see how they cry," she said.

US jobless claims rise but remain near a half-century low

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The number of people seeking unemployment benefits ticked up last week but remained at a historically low level, reflecting a robust U.S. labor market with near record-high job openings and few layoffs.

Jobless claims rose by 18,000 to 185,000, the Labor Department said Thursday, after nearly touching the lowest level since 1968 in the previous week. The four-week average of claims, which levels out week-to-week ups and downs, edged up from 170,000 to 172,000.

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"Claims are still at very low levels, underscoring historically tight labor market conditions," said Nancy Vanden Houten, lead U.S. economist at Oxford Economics. "We expect initial claims to remain below (200,000) in the weeks ahead, as employers, who continue to struggle to attract and retain workers, will keep layoffs to a minimum."

Two years after the coronavirus pandemic sent the economy into a brief but devastating recession, American workers are enjoying extraordinary job security. Weekly applications for unemployment aid, a proxy for layoffs, have remained consistently below the pre-pandemic level of 225,000.

Last year, employers added a record 6.7 million jobs, and they've added an average of 560,000 more each month so far in 2022. The unemployment rate, which soared to 14.7% in April 2020 in the depths of the COVID-19 recession, is now just 3.6%, barely above the lowest point in 50 years. And there is a record proportion of 1.7 job openings for every unemployed American.

The resilience of the job market and the overall U.S. economy is striking in light of a still-destructive pandemic, the economic consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine and the highest consumer inflation in 40 years.

Fewer than 1.48 million Americans were collecting traditional unemployment benefits in the week of April 2.

How France's presidential election could impact Ukraine war

PARIS (AP) — The capital of France may be thousands of miles away from the battlefields of eastern Ukraine, but what happens in French voting stations this month could have repercussions there.

Far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen has close ties to Russia and wants to weaken the European Union and NATO, which could undercut Western efforts to stop Russia's war on Ukraine. Le Pen is trying to unseat centrist President Emmanuel Macron, who has a slim lead in polls ahead of France's April 24 presidential runoff election.

Here are some of the ways the French election could impact the war in Ukraine:

ARMING UKRAINE

Macron's government has sent 100 million euros worth of weaponry to Ukraine in recent weeks and said Wednesday it will send more as part of a Western military aid effort. France has been a major source of military support for Ukraine since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 from Ukraine and supported separatist fighters in eastern Ukraine.

Le Pen expressed reservations Wednesday about supplying Ukraine with additional arms. She said, if she were elected president, she would continue defense and intelligence aid but would be "prudent" about sending weapons because she thinks the shipments could suck other countries into the war with Russia.

SOFTENING SANCTIONS

Le Pen's campaign has successfully tapped into French voter frustration over rising inflation, which has worsened as a consequence of Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine and the ensuing Western sanctions against Russia, a major gas supplier and trade partner for France and Europe.

The European Union has been unusually unified in agreeing on five rounds of ever-tougher sanctions against Russia. If she became France's president, Le Pen could try to thwart or limit additional EU sanctions since further action requires unanimous backing from the bloc's 27 member nations.

France is the EU's No. 2 economy after Germany and key to EU decision-making. France also now holds the rotating EU presidency, giving France's next leader significant influence.

Le Pen is notably opposed to sanctions on Russian gas and oil. She also said in the past that she would work to lift sanctions imposed on Russia over its annexation of Crimea, and even recognize Crimea as part of Russia.

COURTING PUTIN

Earlier in his first term, Macron tried reaching out to Putin, inviting him to Versailles and a presidential resort on the Mediterranean, in hopes of bringing Russia's policies back into greater alignment with the West.

The French president also sought to revive peace talks between Moscow and Kyiv over the long-running conflict in eastern Ukraine between the government and Russia-backed separatists. Macron visited Putin at the Kremlin weeks before Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine and has continued talking to the Russian

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leader during the war. At the same time, Macron has supported multiple rounds of EU sanctions.

Le Pen's party has deep ties to Russia. She met with Putin as a French presidential candidate in 2017 and has praised him in the past. She is warmly welcomed at Russian Embassy events in Paris, and her far-right party also got a 9 million-euro (\$9.8 million) loan from a Russian-Czech bank because she said French banks refused to lend the party money.

Le Pen says the war in Ukraine has partly changed her mind about Putin, but she said Wednesday that the West should try to restore relations with Russia once the conflict ends. She suggested a "strategic rapprochement" between NATO and Russia to keep Moscow from allying too closely with China.

WEAKENING NATO AND THE EU

While Macron is a staunch defender of the EU and recently reinforced France's participation in NATO operations in Eastern Europe, Le Pen says France should keep its distance from international alliances and strike its own path.

She favors pulling France out of NATO's military command, which would take French military staff out of the body that plans operations and lead to the country losing influence within the Western military alliance.

France withdrew from NATO's command structure in 1966, when French President Charles de Gaulle wanted to distance his country from the U.S.-dominated organization, and reintegrated under conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2009.

If it were up to her, Le Pen would reduce French spending on the EU and try to diminish the EU's influence by chipping away at the bloc from within while no longer recognizing that European law has primacy over national law.

Homeschooling surge continues despite schools reopening

By CAROLYN THOMPSON Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The coronavirus pandemic ushered in what may be the most rapid rise in homeschooling the U.S. has ever seen. Two years later, even after schools reopened and vaccines became widely available, many parents have chosen to continue directing their children's educations themselves.

Homeschooling numbers this year dipped from last year's all-time high, but are still significantly above pre-pandemic levels, according to data obtained and analyzed by The Associated Press.

Families that may have turned to homeschooling as an alternative to hastily assembled remote learning plans have stuck with it — reasons include health concerns, disagreement with school policies and a desire to keep what has worked for their children.

In 18 states that shared data through the current school year, the number of homeschooling students increased by 63% in the 2020-2021 school year, then fell by only 17% in the 2021-2022 school year.

Around 3% of U.S. students were homeschooled before the pandemic-induced surge, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The rising numbers have cut into public school enrollment in ways that affect future funding and renewed debates over how closely homeschooling should be regulated. What remains unknown is whether this year's small decrease signals a step toward pre-pandemic levels — or a sign that homeschooling is becoming more mainstream.

Linda McCarthy, a suburban Buffalo mother of two, says her children are never going back to traditional school.

Unimpressed with the lessons offered remotely when schools abruptly closed their doors in spring 2020, she began homeschooling her then fifth- and seventh-grade children that fall. McCarthy, who had been working as a teacher's aide, said she knew she could do better herself. She said her children have thrived with lessons tailored to their interests, learning styles and schedules.

"There's no more homework 'til the wee hours of the morning, no more tears because we couldn't get things done," McCarthy said.

Once a relatively rare practice chosen most often for reasons related to instruction on religion, homeschooling grew rapidly in popularity following the turn of the century before leveled off at around 3.3%, or about 2 million students, in the years before the pandemic, according to the Census. Surveys have

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indicated factors including dissatisfaction with neighborhood schools, concerns about school environment and the appeal of customizing an education.

In the absence of federal guidelines, there is little uniformity in reporting requirements. Some states, including Connecticut and Nevada, require little or no information from parents, while New York, Massachusetts and some others require parents to submit instruction plans and comply with assessment rules.

The new surge in homeschooling numbers has led state legislatures around the country to consider measures either to ease regulations on homeschool families or impose new ones — debates have gone on for years. Proponents of more oversight point to the potential for undetected cases of child abuse and neglect while others argue for less in the name of parental rights.

All of the 28 state education departments that provided homeschooling data to the AP reported that homeschooling spiked in 2020-21, when fears of infection kept many school buildings closed. Of the 18 states whose enrollment data included the current school year, all but one state said homeschooling declined from the previous year but remained well above pre-pandemic levels. (The exception, South Dakota, recently changed the way it collects data).

Minnesota, for example, reported that 27,801 students are being homeschooled now, compared to 30,955 during the last school year. Before the pandemic, homeschool figures were around 20,000 or less.

Black families make up many of the homeschool converts. The proportion of Black families homeschooling their children increased by five times, from 3.3% to 16.1%, from spring 2020 to the fall, while the proportion about doubled across other groups, according to U.S. Census surveys.

Raleigh, North Carolina, mother Laine Bradley said the school system's shortcomings became more evident to families like hers when remote learning began.

"I think a lot of Black families realized that when we had to go to remote learning, they realized exactly what was being taught. And a lot of that doesn't involve us," said Bradley, who decided to homeschool her 7-, 10- and 11-year-old children. "My kids have a lot of questions about different things. I'm like, 'Didn't you learn that in school?' They're like, 'No.'"

Bradley, who works in financial services, converted her dining room into a classroom and rearranged her work schedule to take over her children's education, adding lessons on financial literacy, Black history and Caribbean history important to her heritage.

"I can incorporate things that I feel like they should know," she said. Her husband, Vince, who retired from the Air Force last year, steps in at times. The couple also have a 14-month-old. They plan to continue homeschooling for as long as their children want it. Her social media posts about her experience have drawn so much interest that Bradley recently created an online community called Black Moms Do Homeschool to share resources and experiences.

Boston University researcher Andrew Bacher-Hicks said data showed that while homeschool rates rose across the board during the last school year, the increase was greater in school districts that reverted to in-person learning, perhaps before some parents were ready to send their children back.

He said the same health concerns that drove those increases are likely behind the continued elevated rates, despite additional upheaval in schools as parents and policy-makers debate issues surrounding race and gender and which books should be in libraries.

"It's really hard to disentangle those two things because all of this is kind of happening at the same time," he said. "But my my guess would be that a large part of the decisions to exit from the system do have to do with COVID-related issues as opposed to political issues, because those things come up frequently and we've never seen an increase in homeschooling rates like this before."

He said parents also may be concerned about the quality of education delivered by schools that have had to rely heavily on substitute teachers amid pandemic-caused staffing shortages.

McCarthy, the mom from suburban Buffalo, said it was a combination of everything, with the pandemic compounding the misgivings she had already held about the public school system, including her philosophical differences over the need for vaccine and mask mandates and academic priorities.

The pandemic, she said, "was kind of — they say the straw that broke the camel's back — but the camel's back was probably already broken."

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"There are kids that don't know basic English structure but they want to push other things on children, and it can be blatant but it can be, and mostly is, very subtle, very, very subtle," McCarthy said. "So we were ready to pull them and will never send them back to traditional school. It's just not a fit for us."

"It's just a whole new world that is a much better world for us," she said.

For churches hit by disasters, Easter brings promise of hope

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO, HOLLY MEYER and PETER ORSI Associated Press

Easter's message of renewal will be especially poignant this year for four U.S. congregations rebounding from disasters.

Their churches were destroyed by a tornado in Kentucky, gutted by a blaze in New York City, shattered when Hurricane Ida hit the Louisiana coast, and filled with smoke and ash by the most destructive wildfire in Colorado history. For the pastors, Easter's promise of hope couldn't be more timely.

KENTUCKY

Members of Mayfield First United Methodist Church won't be celebrating Easter in their 100-year-old sanctuary. They can't.

A Dec. 10 tornado ripped apart their stately building as it carved a deadly path through the western Kentucky community of about 10,000 people. A demolition crew tore down the rest.

Instead, on Easter Sunday, members will walk into their temporary home, Christ United Methodist Church, to mark the holy day.

"That's going to be tough," said the Rev. Joey Reed. He rode out the storm at Mayfield First, wondering if he would live to officiate his daughter's wedding.

Reed started ministering soon after, encouraging his roughly 100 church members to pivot from suffering to servanthood. Congregants walked through the disaster zone assessing needs, passing out gift cards, helping residents rescue belongings.

"The example of Jesus Christ is the suffering servant," he said. "When we turn away from our own difficulties ... we are able to let go of our own pain for a minute and focus on our neighbor."

Only in recent weeks – after performing his daughter's wedding, escaping to a cabin with his wife, mourning the death of their cat – did Reed realize he was still carrying around trauma from the storm.

But there has been hope amid the despair, like the pieces of the church's baptismal font rescued from a landfill. "We are all about finding those bright spots," Reed said.

NEW YORK CITY

The Middle Collegiate Church gospel choir swayed to the beat of a live band during a joyful rehearsal at a synagogue that has become their new home.

"It's Passover and our Jewish friends are exercising the most radical hospitality," said the Rev. Jacqui Lewis, the church's senior minister.

Her church was gutted by a fire on Dec. 5, 2020, a grim coda to year of pandemic-related challenges. As the church rebuilds, its congregants were recently welcomed to gather in-person at the East End Temple.

"It was very clear when the tragedy fell on Middle Collegiate Church that we needed to live out our values, open our doors," said Rabbi Joshua Stanton, who will offer prayer during the church's Easter celebration.

On Palm Sunday, the choir belted out hymns in preparation for Easter.

"It feels like a miracle, going through the fire and the pandemic worldwide, all that we've gone through... to now have a place to call home," said Joy Lau, a member of the Jerriese Johnson gospel choir.

The multicultural congregation aspires to "take-it-to-the-streets activism." Members have provided meals to people with AIDS, worked on storm recovery, demonstrated for racial justice and for LGBTQ and women's rights.

The church's belfry housed New York's Liberty Bell, which tolled to mark the country's birth in 1776 and has rung in remembrance of the 9/11 terror attacks. The bell and the skeletal façade were the only parts of the sanctuary to survive.

Amid the grief of losing their church, Lewis asks parishioners to "worship God with joy" and embrace

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Easter's promise of hope.

"For Middle, this is a time of resurrection," she said.

LOUISIANA

The windows at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic church were blown out, and its ceiling, sacristy and vestibule crumbled after Hurricane Ida blasted ashore in August, hitting the small fishing community of Point-aux-Chenes, about 80 miles (130 kilometers) southwest of New Orleans.

Since then, its pastor, the Rev. Rajasekar Karumelnathan, has celebrated Mass in the rectory and under a tent in the parking lot. Attendance dwindled after the storm: from about 80 people who used to attend Sunday services to about 15 now.

Celebrating Christmas under the ruins was especially emotional for the congregation, the pastor said. But he expects a lighter mood for their first, post-Ida Easter service, with its promise of eternal life.

"We have lots of hope," he said. "Easter strengthens us."

Parishioner Teddy Neal, who lives a half mile from the church, is still rebuilding his storm-damaged home. He would love to see his church and home restored.

"I see Easter as a new beginning," said Neal, a truck driver. "I'm pretty much humbled, where it doesn't matter what the conditions are -- as long as I'm present with Jesus during the Eucharist."

COLORADO

At the charred remains of Bill and Jackie Stephens' home in Superior, where they raised four kids and made countless memories over 22 years, the daffodils are blooming again.

When he looks at the green shoots and yellow blossoms, Bill Stephens sees rebirth. He also feels grief anew: for the house, the incinerated photos, the beloved yard.

"As a pastor I see this and go, this is an Easter illustration. It's life out of the death," Stephens said. "In some ways it's beautiful, and in other ways it's the reminder of, dang, we lost a lot."

The lead pastor at Ascent Community Church in neighboring Louisville and his loved ones are one of 26 families in the congregation who lost their homes Dec. 30 in a wind-whipped wildfire that destroyed 1,084 residences in Denver-area suburbs.

The church itself, a cavernous space inside a former Sam's Club, was largely spared. The flames wrapped around the building, scorching trees and shrubs. But ash and smoke seeped in through skylights and ventilation shafts, coating everything in sooty charcoal.

Volunteers hauled out everything that wasn't nailed down to be washed before a building-wide deep clean. Ascent returned in February after two months of worshipping in a hotel ballroom.

In the early days, police used Ascent's parking lot as a staging area for displaced residents. Thousands showed up and were met by church members, therapy dogs and meals.

Stephens said suffering his own loss positioned him to minister to others. While he stresses that there's still a long road to recovery, he sees special meaning in Christ's resurrection this year.

"That Jesus conquered the grave, conquered the sin ... and breathed life on Easter Sunday," Stephens said, "there's something really powerful about thinking about ours as just a minor version of that."

Today in History: April 15, Titanic sinks; 1,500 dead

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, April 15, the 105th day of 2022. There are 260 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 15, 1912, the British luxury liner RMS Titanic foundered in the North Atlantic off Newfoundland more than 2 1/2 hours after hitting an iceberg; 1,514 people died, while less than half as many survived.

On this date:

In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln died nine hours after being shot the night before by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre in Washington; Andrew Johnson became the nation's 17th president.

In 1892, General Electric Co., formed by the merger of the Edison Electric Light Co. and other firms, was

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incorporated in Schenectady, New York.

In 1945, during World War II, British and Canadian troops liberated the Nazi concentration camp Bergen-Belsen. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who died on April 12, was buried at the Roosevelt family home in Hyde Park, New York.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson, baseball's first Black major league player of the modern era, made his official debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers on opening day at Ebbets Field. (The Dodgers defeated the Boston Braves, 5-3.)

In 1955, Ray Kroc opened the first franchised McDonald's restaurant in Des Plaines, Illinois.

In 1974, members of the Symbionese Liberation Army held up a branch of the Hibernia Bank in San Francisco; a member of the group was SLA kidnap victim Patricia Hearst, who by this time was going by the name "Tania" (Hearst later said she'd been forced to participate).

In 1989, 96 people died in a crush of soccer fans at Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield, England. Students in Beijing launched a series of pro-democracy protests; the demonstrations culminated in a government crackdown at Tiananmen Square.

In 1998, Pol Pot, the notorious leader of the Khmer Rouge, died at age 72, evading prosecution for the deaths of 2 million Cambodians.

In 2009, whipped up by conservative commentators and bloggers, tens of thousands of protesters staged "tea parties" around the country to tap into the collective angst stirred up by a bad economy, government spending and bailouts.

In 2013, two bombs made from pressure cookers exploded at the Boston Marathon finish line, killing two women and an 8-year-old boy and injuring more than 260. Suspected bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev (TAM'-ehr-luhn tsahr-NEYE'-ehv) died in a shootout with police; his brother, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (joh-HAHR' tsahr-NEYE'-ehv), was tried, convicted and sentenced to death. (A federal appeals court threw out the death sentence, but the Supreme Court reinstated it in March 2022.)

In 2019, fire swept across the top of the Notre Dame Cathedral as the soaring Paris landmark underwent renovations; the blaze collapsed the cathedral's spire and spread to one of its landmark rectangular towers, but fire officials said the church's structure had been saved.

In 2020, the government reported that the nation's industrial output in March registered its biggest decline since the U.S. demobilized at the end of World War II as factories shut down amid the coronavirus epidemic. The Treasury Department confirmed that, in an unprecedented move, President Donald Trump's name would appear on the stimulus checks that the IRS would be sending to tens of millions of Americans.

Ten years ago: North Korea's new leader, Kim Jong Un, gave his first public speech since taking power upon death of his father, Kim Jong Il, the previous December, portraying himself as a strong military chief unafraid of foreign powers. Passengers and crew of the cruise ship MS Balmoral said prayers at the spot in the North Atlantic where the Titanic sank 100 years earlier.

Five years ago: North Korea paraded its intercontinental ballistic missiles in a massive military display in central Pyongyang as it celebrated the 1912 birthday of the country's founder, Kim Il Sung, with his grandson, Kim Jong Un, looking on with delight.

One year ago: Eight people were shot and killed at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis by a former FedEx employee who then took his own life. The White House announced the expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats and sanctions against dozens of people and companies; the moves were to hold the Kremlin accountable for interference in the 2020 presidential election and the SolarWinds cyber hacking of federal government agencies. The defense at the Minneapolis murder trial of former Officer Derek Chauvin in the death of George Floyd rested its case without putting Chauvin on the stand.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Claudia Cardinale is 84. Author and politician Jeffrey Archer is 82. Rock singer-guitarist Dave Edmunds is 79. Actor Michael Tucci is 76. Actor Lois Chiles is 75. Writer-producer Linda Bloodworth-Thomason is 75. Actor Amy Wright is 72. Columnist Heloise is 71. Actor Sam McMurray is 70. Actor-screenwriter Emma Thompson is 63. Bluegrass musician Jeff Parker is 61. Singer Samantha Fox is 56. Olympic gold, silver and bronze medal swimmer Dara Torres is 55. Rock musician Ed O'Brien (Radiohead) is

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54. Actor Flex Alexander is 52. Actor Danny Pino is 48. Actor Douglas Spain is 48. Country singer-songwriter Chris Stapleton is 44. Actor Luke Evans is 43. Rock musician Patrick Carney (The Black Keys) is 42. Rock musician Zach Carothers (Portugal. The Man) is 41. Actor-writer Seth Rogen is 40. Actor Alice Braga is 39. Americana singer-songwriter Margo Price is 39. Rock musician De'Mar Hamilton (Plain White T's) is 38. Actor Samira Wiley is 35. Actor Leonie Elliott is 34. Actor Emma Watson is 32. Actor Maisie Williams is 25.